SPECIAL TIME EDITION

FORMULA 1

F1 COMES TO AMERICA

Faster, Smarter, and Sexier Than Ever Before

PLUS

F1 THE MOVIE

TIME

FORMULA 1

McLaren's Lando Norris followed by Lewis Hamilton (then with Mercedes) at the British Grand Prix, 2023.

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Red Bull's Max Verstappen drove in the qualifying session for the Grand Prix at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, 2023.

FORMULA 1'S DRAMATIC COMEBACK

The Netflix hit *Drive to Survive* helped F1 crack the U.S. market and rejuvenated the sport, but that's not the only factor behind the rise.

BY SAM HALL

IT WAS ONE OF THE FAVORITE PHRASES OF the late, great Formula 1 commentator Murray Walker: "Anything happens in Grand Prix racing, and it usually does." His words, which meant to capture how unpredictable the sport is, have never been truer than in recent years. From its place as a niche sport with a handful of famous drivers, Formula 1 has transformed into a huge sporting competition with three-quarters of a billion fans. The average global television audience for a Grand Prix race is 60 million to 70 million, with the 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix pulling in 109 million viewers. F1 drivers have become spokespeople for products such as Tumi luggage and Jack Daniel's (Lando Norris) and Ray-Ban sunglasses (Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz). If you scroll through TikTok, you might catch engineer Guenther Steiner making guacamole for Chipotle. In the U.S., there are now three Grand Prix races, the most of any country, and even Hollywood is getting in on the game, with an F1 movie starring Brad Pitt.

The soapy, high-octane Netflix docuseries *Drive*

2025 drivers, preseason. Back row, from left: Oscar Piastri, McLaren (in orange); Alexander Albon, Willams; Jack Doohan, Alpine; Nico Hulkenberg, Sauber; Isack Hadjar, Racing Bulls; Fernando Alonso, Aston Martin; Gabriel Bortoleto, Sauber; Lando Norris, McLaren; Oliver Bearman, Haas. Middle Row: Lance Stroll, Aston Martin (in green); Esteban Ocon, Haas; Lewis Hamilton, Ferrari; Pierre Gasly, Alpine; Andrea Kimi Antonelli, Mercedes. Front row: George Russell, Mercedes (in black); Yuki Tsunoda, Red Bull; Liam Lawson, Red Bull; Carlos Sainz, Williams; Max Verstappen, Red Bull; Charles Leclerc, Ferrari

to Survive, which hooked thousands of new fans during the pandemic, is often credited with driving the Formula 1 boom, and it was hard not to fall for the show's larger-than-life characters and twisty plotlines. There were the trials and tribulations of Haas, the sole American team and the newest competitors on the grid. There was the time Red Bull severed ties with Renault—reducing Renault's revenue while Renault was maneuvering to steal Red Bull's driver, Daniel Ricciardo. And then there was heart-stopping season 3 episode "Man on Fire," in which driver Romain Grosjean emerged—unharmed—from his car, which had exploded into a fiery ball. Not only did first-week *Drive* viewership jump 40 percent between season 4 and season 5, to just under 570,000 in 2023, on ESPN, which broadcasts F1 races, average viewership per race vaulted from 554,000 people across 21 races in 2018 to a record 1.2 million over 22 races in 2022.

Yet while the Netflix-as-catalyst is an easy shorthand to explain Formula 1's sudden popularity in the U.S., the narrative also leaves out much, including the motorsport's champagne-soaked history and the role played by Liberty Media, which acquired the series in 2016. Among other things, Liberty launched the F1 subscriptions service, which let fans stream races live and prioritized a younger audience. To better leverage social media, Liberty relaxed strict licensing rules that once prevented drivers from posting photos from the paddock, and F1 itself began uploading funny videos of driver and team reactions. The meme moments stacked up: Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda's radio outbursts; Fernando Alonso's catchphrase, "El Plan"; and "Fernando is faster than you," a reference to the time Ferrari instructed driver Felipe Massa to let Alonso pass. Fans flocked to Reddit communities like r/formuladank, and YouTube shows like *McLaren Unboxed*, which followed McLaren drivers Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri on race weekends. By the end of 2023, almost half of fans surveyed by Buzz Radar reported they had discovered F1 through social media or family; only 14% said they had learned about the sport from *Drive to Survive*.

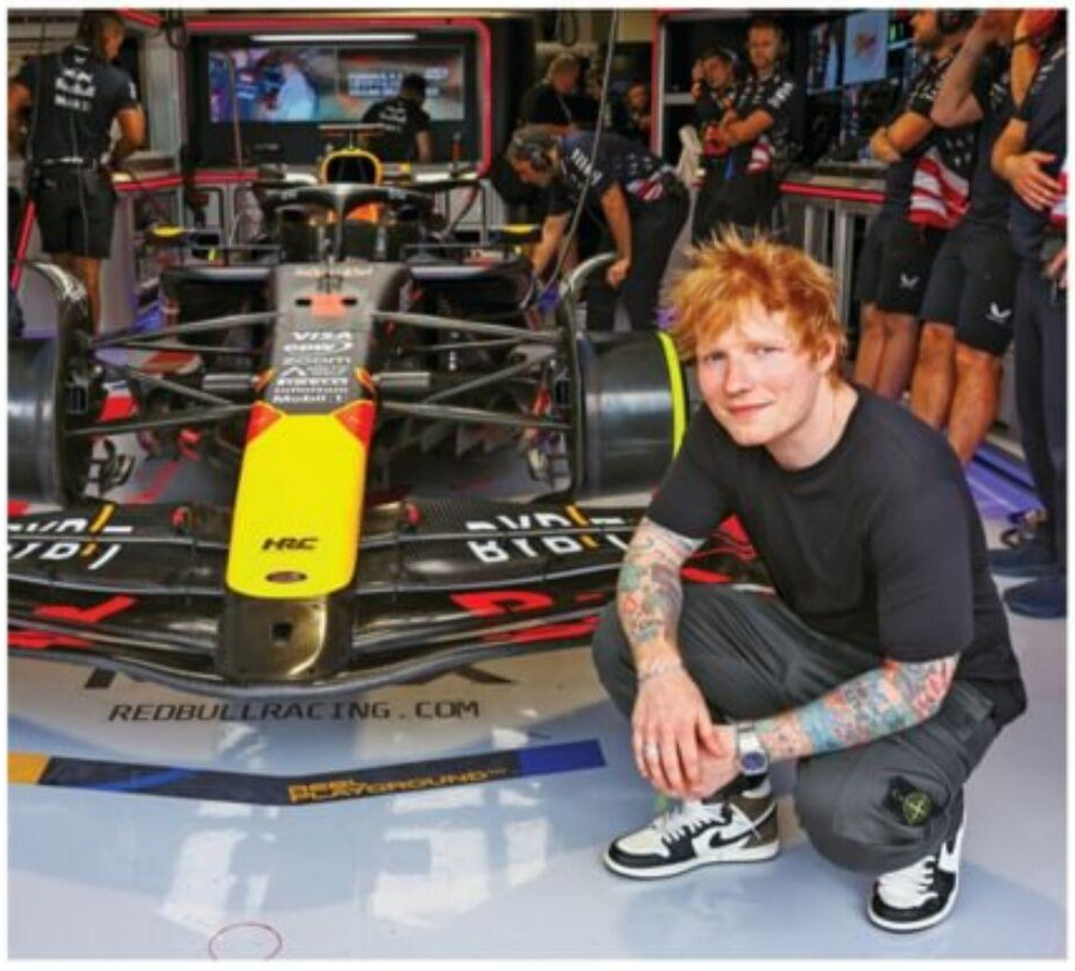
"It's a nice sexy, easy story to say that *Drive to Survive* came along and everyone fell in love with this sport that was very obscure," says Toni Cowan-Brown, an F1 social media personality. But that analysis, she says, ignores the rise of the creator economy, and the way social media made F1 accessible to different kinds of audiences. Not just Europeans, the traditional consumers of the sport, but also Americans, people from the Middle East, new fans who were not steeped in F1 lore or team statistics but who liked the speed or spectacle or a specific driver. "Not everything has to be so serious or complex; it can just be talking about Charles Leclerc's dog or Carlos Sainz's haircut. There's something quirky and funny in that," says Cowan-Brown. "Social media helped lower the barriers of entry . . . anyone who consumed the sport a little bit differently could find their own community."

TODAY, ABOUT 40% OF F1 FANS ARE FEMALE, UP FROM 8% IN 2017, AND WOMEN BETWEEN 16 AND 24 ARE THE FASTEST-GROWING AUDIENCE.

The truth of Cowan-Brown's observation can be seen in F1's shifting demographics. Today, about 40% of F1 fans are female, up from 8% in 2017, and women between 16 and 24 are the fastest-growing audience for the motorsport. The average F1 fan is 32 years old, which is down from 40 in 2019, and is younger than the average NFL or NBA fan. Saudi Arabia is the biggest growth market. Less than a year after F1 launched an F1 WhatsApp channel, it had over 7 million subscribers, suggesting the growth in fans around the globe.

Formula 1 is not the only entertainment option enjoying a post-pandemic surge. After a fitful recovery, the pop music–touring industry has reached a record high, enabled by superstar tours, pent-up fan demand, and ever-higher ticket prices. Meanwhile, in 2024, 18.6 million people attended an NFL game (thanks in part to the extra game added to the regular schedule in 2021), which increased league attendance by more than 10% from 2019. Major League Baseball registered a 4.2% increase in attendance in 2024 compared with its last full season before the pandemic; in the same time frame, attendance for NBA (2.7%) and NHL (3.1%) games also increased.

The difference with Formula 1 in America is that the series started with a very small fan base. Historically, Americans have been less interested in F1 races because of the sport's Europe-centric focus. Races were in different time zones, with few Amer-



Ed Sheeran, left, got hooked on F1 watching Drive to Survive. *Joe and Nick Jonas at the Miami Grand Prix, 2023.*

ican drivers and teams to root for. And even if U.S. motorsports fans could have tuned in easily, they preferred homegrown races like NASCAR and IndyCar. For Liberty Media, it was a taller order to fill seats for F1 than it was for Live Nation to convince people to return to in-person concerts to catch Beyoncé or Taylor Swift, or for the Madison Square Garden Company to summon Knicks fans back to the Garden.

Folks who count themselves as Formula 1 fans today are in fancy company. A stable of A-listers share their enthusiasm, and those celebrities have helped create buzz around the sport just by showing up. Spot Kendall Jenner or Camila Cabello or Ed Sheeran or Joe Jonas or Anya Taylor-Joy or Tom Brady at a race, and there's a good chance they will be sharing their experience with their millions of followers. Many of those social media followers may not know F1 but get curious. Actors Ryan Reynolds, Rob McElhenney, and Michael B. Jordan became so enamored by F1, they bought into an investment group that will own a quarter of Alpine F1, a U.K. racing team owned by Renault, in a deal valued at around $218 million.

Glamorous new races in Miami (introduced in 2022) and Las Vegas (2023) also raised F1's visibility in the U.S., and Liberty has continued to display its marketing chops in flashy events, like the 2025 season launch in London's O2 Arena. There, for the first time ever, all 10 teams revealed their new liveries. All 20 drivers were also on show in their new colors. There were celebrity guests aplenty, and Machine Gun Kelly, Kane Brown, Tems, and Take That provided musical entertainment.

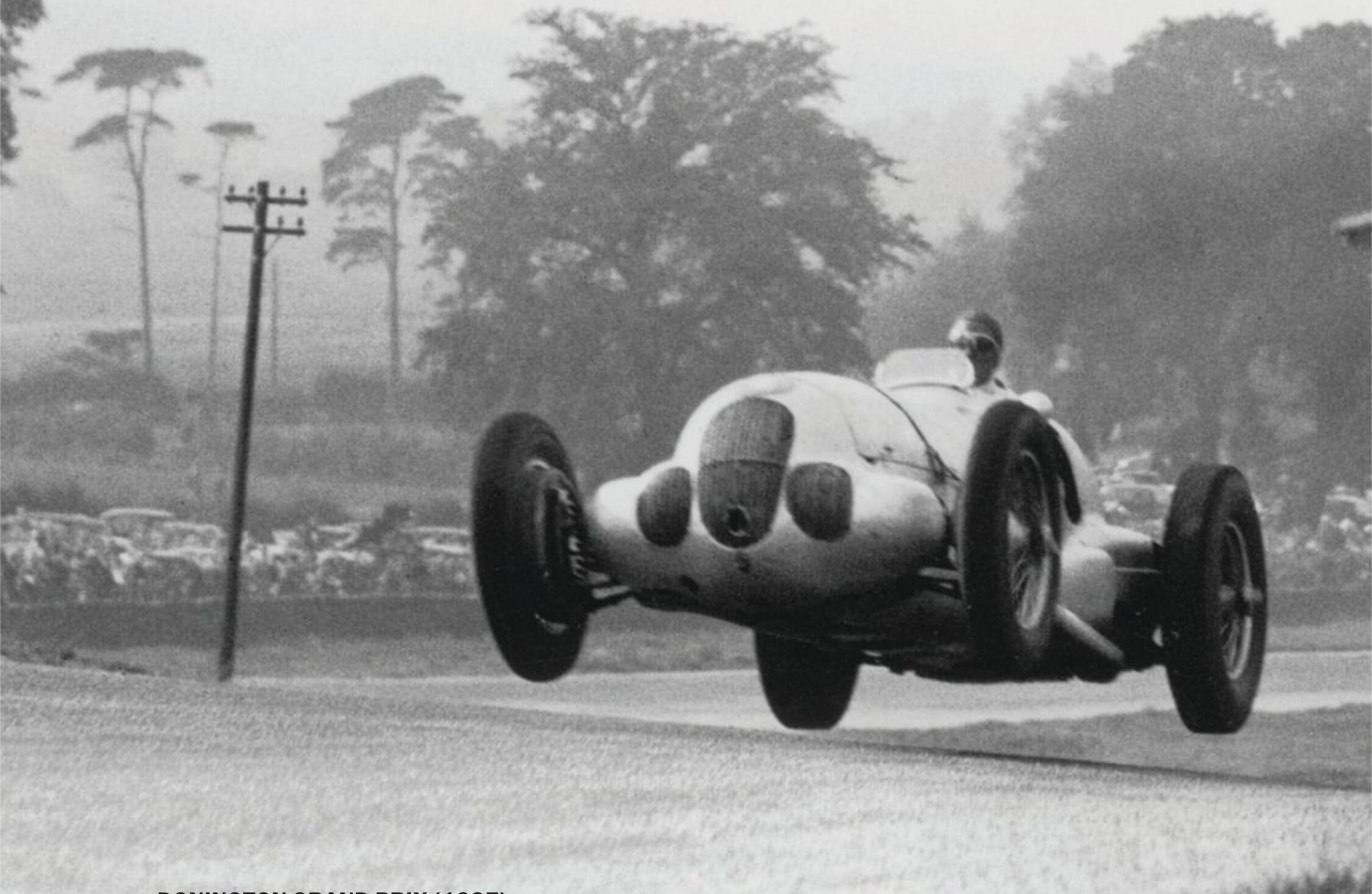
It would be difficult for Formula 1 to sustain the growth it has enjoyed in the last few years, and there are signs that television interest has plateaued in the U.S. In 2024, an average of 1.1 million viewers tuned in to watch 24 F1 races on ESPN— the same average viewership as 2023 and a dip from the average viewership in 2022. Numbers for for *Drive to Survive* have also softened. Yet Liberty says growth in key markets continues to be strong, and judging by recently announced partnerships, luxury brands are rushing to bask in Formula1's halo. As of January 2025, F1 has a 10-year agreement with LVMH, embedding the French conglomerate's brands into F1 events, from the iconic podium champagne spray (Moët & Chandon) to wristwatches (Tag Heuer is the new timekeeping partner). French F1 driver Pierre Gasly is now the ambassador for Givenchy's Gentleman fragrance, and McLaren's star Lando Norris is the new face of Ralph Lauren Fragrances.

The F1 movie, which stars Brad Pitt, Javier Bardem, and Damson Idris, follows a retired F1 driver who returns to the sport to mentor a rookie at the behest of a team owner. Among the producers are seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton—not incidentally, F1's most-followed personality on social media by far. *F1* also includes footage filmed during race weekends and real Formula 1 drivers; Hamilton has talked it up as the most authentic racing movie ever made.

One of the movie posters features a tight shot of Pitt in a racing helmet, his piercing blue eyes enticing ticket buyers. Another focuses on his well-toned torso. F1 and Brad Pitt. Talk about a halo effect. ◻

AWAY WE GO

Grand Prix racing dates to the late 19th century, but the first Formula 1 World Championship Grand Prix race was held in England in 1950. Defined by strategy, endurance, and speed, the races today are staged around the globe, making F1 a truly international sport.



DONINGTON GRAND PRIX (1937)
The Donington Grand Prix, in Leicestershire, England, was held just four times, from 1935 to 1938, but then was canceled because of World War II. Here, Manfred von Brauchitsch of Mercedes maneuvered the Melbourne rise section of the circuit.

ITALIAN GRAND PRIX (1953)

Opposite: Stirling Moss of Britain, one of the best drivers of all time, was as famous for his skill behind the wheel as for never winning the world championship. Here, Moss supervised the filling of his tank at the Italian Grand Prix, a race in which he placed 13th.

MONACO GRAND PRIX (1957)

Above: Juan Manuel Fangio of Argentina, having just switched teams from Ferrari to Maserati, won the 105-lap race. In the late 1950s, F1 cars were hitting speeds up to 180 m.p.h.

DUTCH GRAND PRIX (1966)

Right: Scotland's Jim Clark, in his Lotus, won the Dutch race four times, more than any other driver, but took third in 1966. During the 1960s, F1 added safety features such as roll bars, seat belts, and fire-protection measures to car designs.

SPANISH GRAND PRIX (1970)
Jackie Stewart (in the blue car) passed a fire crew hosing down the cars of Jackie Oliver and Jacky Ickx, who had collided during the race. Ickx was slightly burned but was able to compete in the next race. Oliver was unharmed.

AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX (2000)
Above: McLaren-Mercedes driver David Coulthard (silver car front, center) of Britain at the starting line. Over the years, the Australian Grand Prix has been held in 23 different venues around the country, but since 1996 it has taken place in Melbourne.

MONACO GRAND PRIX (2001)
Opposite: Probably the most famous and glamorous on the F1 circuit, the Monaco GP, which runs through the principality's streets, started in 1929 and was part of a European championship. Here, Benetton driver Giancarlo Fisichella rounded the Loews hairpin curve.

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KOREAN AIR
vodafone

RICHARD MILLE
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POWER

BELGIAN GRAND PRIX (2018)

After being hit by Nico Hülkenberg's Renault, Fernando Alonso, in his McLaren, flipped over the Sauber of Charles Leclerc. The drivers were unhurt but were eliminated from the race.

ITALIAN GRAND PRIX (2022)
Second-place finisher Charles Leclerc popped champagne in front of fans at the Monza track. First place went to Max Verstappen.

ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX (2022)
Top: The car of Carlos Sainz of Spain was worked on in the Scuderia Ferrari pit ahead of the last Grand Prix of the 2022 season. Sainz finished fourth in the race, which was won by Max Verstappen.

BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX (2023)
Above: The Red Bull team members congratulated their driver Max Verstappen as he crossed the line to take victory at the start of a dominant 2023 season.

EMILIA ROMAGNA GRAND PRIX (2024)

Fans celebrated at the end of the race, won by Charles Leclerc. The track, in Imola, is one of the few major international circuits that runs counterclockwise.

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SPEED, GLORY, AND GLAMOUR

Riding on its champagne-soaked history, telegenic drivers, off-track drama, and cars that can hit 230 m.p.h., Formula 1 has finally cracked the U.S. market.

TECHNOLOGY
TECHNOLOGY
CHAMPION
SHELL
SHELL
CHAMPION

AMPING UP THE AMERICAN GRANDS PRIX

$125,000 hotel rooms. $23,000 tickets. Formula 1's Miami debut was gilded and glamorous.

BY SEAN GREGORY

Palm trees and a fake marina with yachts are two of the distinctive features of the Miami International Autodrome.

FORMULA 1 MADE ITS MIAMI DEBUT IN 2022, on the second Sunday in May, replete with South Beach excess. Only days earlier, tickets were going for $23,000 and higher on the secondary market; one hotel in the area was charging $125,000 per night for a suite on race weekend; and there were dry-docked yachts sitting in fake turquoise water at the Miami International Autodrome, the 19-turn track outside Hard Rock Stadium that cost about $40 million to build. The city teemed with exclusive parties; celebrities in attendance included Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Tom Brady, the Williams sisters, Pharrell Williams, Snoop Dogg, and Travis Scott. Some 300,000 fans, sponsors, and partygoers had flocked to Miami for the race—sponsored by Crypto.com—and crowds and spending were expected to exceed those of the city's 2020 Super Bowl. The buzz around the weekend was yet another indicator that F1, the $17 billion racing circuit—famous for races around the globe— was booming in America.

"[MIAMI DISPLAYED] A LEVEL OF EXCESS YOU might not see in Dubai," said Matthew Harrigan, an equity research analyst who covers Formula 1 for the Benchmark Company.

Formula 1, often referred to as F1, arrived in Miami riding a tidal wave of momentum in the U.S. The success of the Netflix show *Drive to Survive*, a behind-the-scenes look at F1's melodramas involving teams and drivers such as seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen, was drawing younger eyeballs to the sport. The fourth season of the program, released that March, was viewed for more than 57 million hours within two weeks; it reached Top 10

status on the streaming platform in 56 countries. In early May, just days before the 2022 Grand Prix, Netflix and Formula 1 confirmed that *Drive to Survive* had been renewed for fifth and sixth seasons.

In what was referred to as the *Drive to Survive* halo effect, viewers began tuning into live Formula 1 races on ESPN. By 2021, the network was averaging 949,000 viewers for its Formula 1 races, up 54% compared with 2020; the F1 season became the most viewed ever on American TV. The first four F1 races of 2022 averaged 1.1 million viewers, a 22% increase over the average for the first four races of 2021. According to Barton Crockett, senior internet media analyst at Rosenblatt Securities, the average F1 race TV audience in the U.S. at the time—in 2021—was up 30% over 2019; by contrast, viewership for NASCAR (-2%), the NFL (-2%), and the NBA (-16%) all declined versus 2019. Some 400,000 fans packed the Circuit of the Americas in Austin for the 2021 Grand Prix, a record for any F1 race. In March 2022, Formula 1 announced it would be adding a Las Vegas race in 2023.

Success in America, the birthplace of NASCAR, had long eluded Formula 1. But its newfound popularity in the States also helped the brand worldwide. In May 2022, Formula 1's parent company, U.S.-based Liberty Media, released first-quarter 2022 earnings:

After 110 tries, McLaren driver Lando Norris scored his first F1 Grand Prix win in Miami in 2024.

Formula 1 revenue jumped 100%, to $360 million, compared with the first three months of 2021. For the year, revenue hit $2.136 billion, up 86.5% over the pandemic-ravaged 2020 season. F1 had 49 million social media followers by the end of 2021, compared with 24.9 million in 2019, a 97% rise. The cumulative worldwide TV audience had increased to 1.55 billion.

LAST-LAP DRAMA

When Liberty Media purchased Formula 1 for $8 billion in 2016, American growth was a top priority, and adding races in glam destination cities like Miami and Las Vegas was key to the strategy. Liberty modernized F1's digital marketing and, for the 2021 season, instituted a U.S.-style budget cap on team spending to create more parity in the sport. Verstappen, who races for Red Bull, ended Hamilton's four-year championship reign. Mercedes won its eighth straight Constructors' championship. F1 also introduced new aerodynamic regulations intended to create more passing opportunities for cars during races, making events more exciting for viewers. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Verstappen alternated wins in each of the first four races of 2022. It was "less of a slam dunk that Lewis Hamilton's going to win every race," said Crockett. "That's good for the product. It creates drama. As opposed to boredom."

F1's ascendance coincided with the expiration of its TV deal after the 2022 season, when the organization was receiving $5 million or so annually from ESPN. The timing for F1 was especially lucrative, and it was able to secure a whopping $90 million a year for the three-year contract. (Today, with the renewal up again, the expectation is that the price tag could go even higher.) Rosenblatt Securities projected that Formula 1 revenues will rise nearly threefold, to $6.5 billion, by 2031.

In America, F1 has had to overcome a checkered past. *Sports Illustrated* reported that in 1989 more people attended a bird race in the Phoenix area than the F1 race held downtown. The 2005 race in Indianapolis was a complete fiasco: Only six of the 20 entrants actually competed. Michelin advised the other 14 competitors, who were racing with the company's tires, that the track posed a safety risk.

Yet in 2022, as race weekend proceeded under the Florida sun, those missteps looked to be in the rearview mirror. F1's gilded age was on full display, and Miami felt like a moment. Glitzy high-speed racing, it seemed, was here to stay. ◻

Taylor Swift to the Rescue

How the pop star saved Austin's Circuit of the Americas.

BY AVA ERICKSON

Top: Taylor Swift performed a 15-song set at COTA in 2016. Above: Max Verstappen competed at the track in 2022.

When the Circuit of the Americas (COTA), a track built for F1 races, opened in 2012 outside of Austin, there hadn't been a U.S. Grand Prix for five years. Initial turnout was decent—about 265,000 over three days—yet attendance slipped over the next three years, hitting 224,000 in 2015, a soggy affair in the wake of Hurricane Patricia. Around the same time, Governor Greg Abbott's office announced that it would cut $6 million in state funding, and COTA's future looked grim.

Enter Taylor Swift.

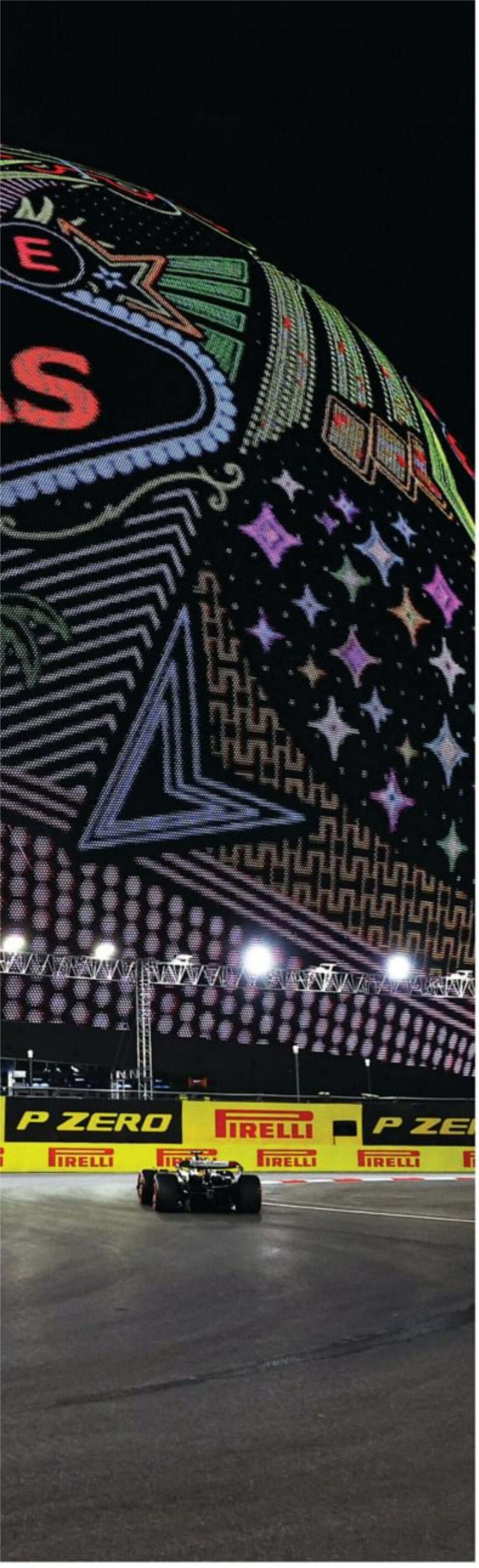
While music had always been part of COTA's identity because of Austin's music scene—Kid Rock and Elton John were early headliners at the race—chairman Bobby Epstein knew he needed more to save the Grand Prix. He got in contact with Swift, who had spent 2015 promoting her album *1989*, did not have a concert scheduled for 2016, and agreed to play. So, on Saturday, October 22, after watching Lewis Hamilton lead the qualifying session, thousands of fans stayed to watch Swift perform a 15-song set. By the end of the weekend, COTA had drawn a record crowd of nearly 270,000.

COTA was back. "We went from 'It's all about the race and that's it' to 'Let's include some more people,' " Glynn Wedgewood, Senior Vice President of Music & Entertainment at COTA told Autosport. Bringing a global pop star to an event normally attended only by (in Wedgewood's words) "gearheads and race fanatics" opened up F1 to a new demographic that included women, young people, and families. "You don't have to take anything away from the race by giving more to the fans," chairman Epstein told the Athletic.

Since 2016, COTA has continued to host huge headliners on race weekend, including Bruno Mars, Britney Spears, and Billy Joel, on their Super Stage, a temporary proscenium that's assembled in the infield between Turns 11 and 12. Queen + Adam Lambert and the Killers performed at the 2023 U.S. Grand Prix, which drew a record 400,000-plus fans, more than that year's Miami Grand Prix (which drew around 275,000) and Las Vegas Grand Prix (with around 300,000).

Today, COTA doesn't really need to host big musical talent to sell tickets, but the track—which hosted Sting and Eminem in 2024—likes the model. "We still want to be the best, we still want to do the biggest events, and we still want to *wow* people," said Wedgewood.

Charles Leclerc of Monaco drove a Ferrari during a practice ahead of the 2023 Las Vegas Grand Prix.



A BET ON LAS VEGAS PAYS OFF

The inaugural Vegas Grand Prix produced the best race of the season and delivered $1.5 billion to Sin City's coffers. Edition two was also a hit, but can the race deliver more?

BY SAM HALL

WHEN LAS VEGAS BROUGHT A FORMULA 1 GRAND Prix race to its streets in November 2023, it felt like a predestined marriage: Finally, the entertainment capital of the world was tying the knot with the globe's most glamorous sport. The 3.8-mile temporary track wound around the city's downtown icons: the Sphere, the Bellagio, and Caesars Palace. The city was flooded with 315,000 fans. Sky boxes were priced at $8,000 to $13,000 per head. Keith Urban, Journey, John Legend, and Kylie Minogue all performed at the opening ceremonies. One thousand drones formed the shape of F1 cars and a spinning roulette wheel overhead. The Grand Prix's 20 drivers were introduced via trapdoors to a raised stage. There were fog machines and lasers. In the words of champion Max Verstappen, the build up was "99 percent show, 1 percent sport." He added, "I don't like it at all."

Still the drivers including Verstappen, Lewis Hamilton, Sergio Pérez, and Charles Leclerc delivered a spectacular race. Over some 90-plus minutes, there were 82 overtakes across 50 laps—the highest number of passes for a dry-weather race in the 2023 season. Sparks flew under the casinos' neon lights as drivers sped down the Strip. A thrilling battle unfolded in the final stretch, with Verstap-

pen, Leclerc, and Pérez changing lead position seven times, and Verstappen clinching the win. "Formula 1 undoubtedly rode its luck during its four-day residency in Las Vegas, yet somehow broke with the city's oldest tradition and came out on top," raved ESPN.

No risk, no reward, the saying goes, and in betting on Vegas, Formula 1 appeared to have scored big-time. Liberty Media, which owns the motorsport league, invested $500 million in the race, and while the company does not break out revenue for individual Grands Prix, the Vegas edition seems to have achieved multiple goals: bringing publicity to the sport, helping establish a firmer hold on the U.S. market, and attracting a different kind of fan—all while increasing the value of broadcast rights. In spite of grumbling from locals about the inconveniences and high ticket prices–the average was $1,667—Las Vegas cleaned up as well. November, when the race takes place, typically is the city's eighth best month of the year. Instead, the Las Vegas Grand Prix made November 2023 its second best month in the city's history, generating $1.5 billion in revenue and $77 million in taxes. The figures were significantly higher than those for the Super Bowl ($1 billion, and $34 million in taxes) that followed in February.

THE 2023 LAS VEGAS GRAND PRIX GENERATED MUCH MORE IN REVENUE AND TAXES THAN THE SUPER BOWL THAT FOLLOWED IN FEBRUARY.

In 2024, the Vegas Grand Prix held strong. Although few expected the race would replicate the financial performance of year one—economic impact fell to $934 million—it was the year's largest money generator for the city and drew praise from early critics, who noted that organizers had learned good lessons. There were still Elvis impersonators in the crowd, mingling with Adele, Seth Rogen, and Paul Mescal, but the hype was scaled back. A simple prerace ceremony replaced the previous extravagant affair.

Whether or not the Las Vegas–Formula 1 union will be a long one remains to be seen. Initially, F1 signed up for three Grands Prix in Vegas for 2023 through 2025 and has suggested it will extend the contract, even though the race "missed internal expectations on revenue," as Liberty Media CEO and president Derek Chang put it on a call with investors on February 27, 2025. (The city has approved racing through 2032). However, a lot would have to go wrong for F1 to give up on racing in Vegas, and Chang was quick to reiterate, "We also know the Vegas race is key to our expansion strategy in the U.S."

This is not the first time Formula 1 has tried to break the code for Las Vegas. In 1981, looking to bring Vegas dazzle to the Formula 1 season finale, promoters arranged to stage a Grand Prix next to Caesars Palace. The idea was to attract the same high rollers who were flocking to the boxing matches at Caesars. But instead of building a permanent track, organizers squeezed a 2.2-mile counterclockwise course into a lot adjacent to the hotel. Dubbed the Caesars Palace Grand Prix, the race satisfied almost no one. The short straightaways and constant tight turns were brutal for drivers, as were temperatures, which hit 99 degrees in 1982. The race drew tepid fan support. After two years, the Caesars experiment was tabled.

LAS VEGAS TODAY IS, OF course, a different place than it was in the early 1980s, when it could be said that Sin City needed the Grand Prix more than Formula 1 needed Vegas. The decade had begun tragically when an electrical fire at the MGM Grand led to the deaths of 87 people, and was followed by a second, though less deadly, fire at the Hilton. With images of the destruction in the news, tourists worried for their safety. At the same time, after New Jersey became only the second state to allow legal casino gambling, in 1978, gaming revenue in Atlantic City soared from zero in 1977 to close to $2 billion in 1985. Vegas felt destined for the rearview mirror.

By contrast, Vegas today is booming, attracting some 40 million visitors a year who in 2023 spent a record $51.5 billion. Why wouldn't Formula 1 want to tap that source, especially as the league continued its push into the U.S. market? Vegas offered everything the league could want in a destination city and then some. It had the glitz, it had the glamour, and it had a proven track record with sporting events, including boxing matches, the WNBA Aces, and the NHL's Vegas Golden Knights.

Negotiations between city officials and Formula 1 started in earnest in the fall of 2021, following that year's Austin Grand Prix in October. One deliberation point was scheduling. Vegas liked the pre-

Speeds during the Las Vegas Grand Prix, which races down the Strip, hit 215 m.p.h. in 2023.

Thanksgiving weekend in November because it alleviated a normally dead period. Formula 1 wanted to ensure that the race worked for the traditional European audience, so it was slated to take place on Saturday night rather than Sunday, as would be the case for a normal weekend.

Logistics were another consideration. Like Monaco, Jeddah and Melbourne, Vegas opted for a street circuit. But whereas those cities shut down completely for 72 hours, Vegas wanted to remain open for the majority of each day, meaning the circuit, crash barriers, and other racing infrastructure needed to allow roads to reopen easily.

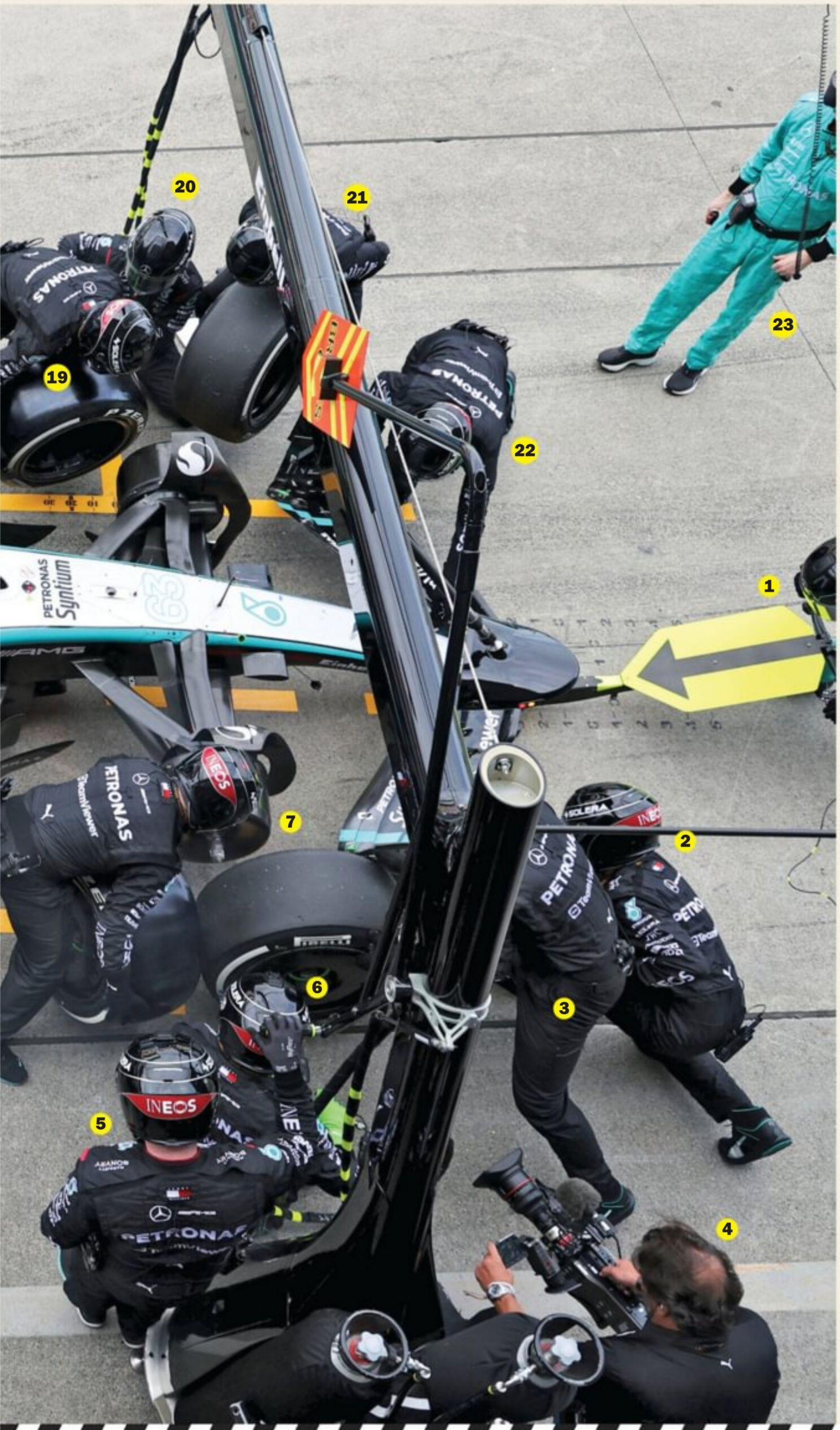
Nevertheless, the two sides made quick progress, and within six months, Formula 1 had announced it would be staging a race in Las Vegas. The rightness of the logic was apparent when in the 24 hours following the announcement, Wynn's Las Vegas and Encore resort saw more requests for hotel room reservations than in any other one-day period in its history.

Not that there weren't bumps in the road. Construction for the inaugural race, which included repaving of roads for the race, started in September and caused extended traffic delays, upsetting locals. Four businesses filed lawsuits against both F1 and Clark County alleging the race cost them millions of dollars in revenue and that the county fast-tracked the race's permit approvals and improperly processed the various event applications. Some F1 drivers complained that the driving was being treated as a sideshow rather than the main event. Just minutes into the first practice session, Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz ran over a manhole cover, which was sucked up by the force of his car's underfloor aerodynamics. He was unhurt but his car was destroyed and the practice session cancelled.

For 2024, Formula 1 worked hard to address those flaws. Officials modified the Strip circuit's manhole covers to prevent a repeat of Sainz's crash and placed more emphasis on the race, which made for great viewing as Verstappen, Hamilton, Leclerc, Sainz, and Mercedes driver George Russell engaged in a tense back-and-forth. In the end, it was Russell who took the day and clearly got caught up in the Vegas spirit, running out of his hospitality unit after his victory, yelling, "Vegas, baby!" ◻

Who's Who in the Pit Stop

BY SAM HALL



Pit stops are make-or-break moments in a Grand Prix, with all drivers—who are in constant radio communication with the pit crew—required to pit at least once to change all four tires and address mechanical issues. A crew of about 20 people (at left, the Mercedes team at the 2024 Japanese Grand Prix) complete their job in under 3 seconds, with McLaren holding the record, at 1.8 seconds at the 2023 Qatar Grand Prix. Unlike NASCAR and IndyCar, there is no refuelling in Formula 1. As the car rolls into the pit, each crew member waits in a precisely designated spot; if the driver misses the mark, the car will need to be reoriented. The following happens almost simultaneously. The **front jack (1)** and **rear jack (14)** "catch" and lift the car as it comes into the pit so the tires can be changed. A three-person team works on each wheel: The **gunner (20, 6, 16, 11)** uses a pneumatic gun to loosen the nut that holds the tire in place; the **wheel off (12, 17, 21, 3)** removes the tire; the **wheel on (13, 15, 19, 7)** replaces it; and the gunner retightens the nut. Two **front-wing flap adjusters (22, 2)**, mechanics with special drills, recalibrate the oversteer or understeer, according to what the driver has requested. Two **radiator cleaners (18, 8)** remove debris from the radiators and balance the car. Once the pit's electronic system signals that all four tires have been properly fitted, **light control (5)** tells the driver to leave the pit box. The **stop board (23)** is a mechanic who can overrule the light control if an error is spotted, serving as a backup to prevent an unsafe release. Similarly, a **reserve mechanic (9)** backs up for the chief mechanic. **Photographers/camera people (4, 10)** are not crew members.

TECHNOLOGY
RICHARD MILLE
RICHARD MILLE
VGW
PLAY

HOW LEWIS HAMILTON GOT HIS FERRARI RED

In one of the biggest team changes in F1 history, the seven-time champ moved from Mercedes to Ferrari for the 2025 season. Now he's aiming for an eighth title, but the road to the record won't be easy.

BY SEAN GREGORY

ON VALENTINE'S DAY, LEWIS HAMILTON enters a sprawling studio space in northwest London and stares intently at the magnificent creature standing off in the distance.

"Sh-t," says Hamilton to no one in particular. "I'm nervous."

Soon enough, however, the seven-time Formula 1 world champion overcomes his anxiety and is standing face-to-face with a black stallion named Aroma. Hamilton's allergies are the source of his initial fears, and doing them no favor, he begins massaging Aroma's coat. But the F1 star, a literal knight, is enamored, peppering the horse master with questions. Where's Aroma from? (Portugal.) Can he sleep lying down? (Yes.) How much does he weigh? (About 1,300 lb. Only a few hundred less than Hamilton's race car.)

He's throwing health caution to the wind in order to commemorate his much-ballyhooed move from Mercedes, where he won six of his seven F1 driver titles, to the venerated Scuderia Ferrari HP race team: a photo of himself positioned in front of an actual black horse standing on his hind legs, mimicking the Italian automaker's famous logo. Like Hamilton, Aroma has an impressive resume, including appearances in *Robin Hood* and *Maleficent*, ads for Hermès and Burberry, and a Dua Lipa video. "This is going to be such an iconic picture," says Hamilton while trying on outfits for the shoot. "Super timeless."

That depends, of course, on what comes after. At 40, Hamilton is aiming to not only win a record eighth F1 driver title—cementing his status as the greatest F1 driver to ever live and ending the 18-year drought for the most storied race team on the planet—but also fulfill a lifelong dream. His move to Ferrari, announced before the 2024 season, was shocking worldwide, front-page news: He had suited up for Mercedes for more than a decade, helped build a more diverse workforce there, and hoped to someday acquire an ownership stake in the

team. It seemed he would ride into the sunset with the Silver Arrows.

Hamilton had other ideas. "You can't stand still for too long," Hamilton tells TIME, in his first in-depth interview about his decision to leave Mercedes for Ferrari. "I needed to throw myself into something uncomfortable again."

Out of respect for Mercedes—with whom he was still under contract—Hamilton didn't talk much about the switch during the 2024 season. The situation was awkward and unprecedented. All sides appear to have handled it as professionally as possible: Hamilton ended a 945-day losing streak by winning his hometown race, at Silverstone in Britain, in July before winning again in Belgium three weeks later. Meanwhile Carlos Sainz, the Ferrari driver whom Hamilton is replacing this year, helped Scuderia finish second in the constructor, or team, standings.

Hamilton's road to the title record won't be easy. Some critics have questioned Ferrari's strategy of signing an aging driver, whose best days could very well be in the rearview. They've wondered whether Ferrari's more interested in marketing than winning—Hamilton is still F1's most popular driver, by a mile, as well as an internationally known cultural figure with a hand in fashion, film, and business. Plus, a slew of younger drivers like reigning four-time champion Red Bull's Max Verstappen, 27; McLaren's Lando Norris, 25; and Hamilton's new Ferrari teammate, Charles Leclerc, 27, could keep him off the top of the podium.

"The old man is a state of mind," says Hamilton. "Of course your body ages. But I'm never going to be an old man."

THE 2025 F1 CAMPAIGN, WHICH kicked off in Australia in March, came laced with intrigue, much of it surrounding Hamilton. Ferrari is religion in Italy; when the team wins an F1 race, the bells of the Church of St. Blaise in Maranello, the small city near Bologna that houses Ferrari headquarters, ring in celebration. So Hamilton's quest to end Ferrari's agony, while breaking the individual title record set by Michael Schumacher—who won five straight titles with Ferrari from 2000 to 2004—was appointment theater.

A Hamilton championship in red, in the twilight of his racing life, would be one of the greatest mic-drop moments in sports history. "I don't know if I can find an adjective to describe that," says American racing legend Mario Andretti, the 1978 F1 champion who raced for Ferrari in the early '70s. "Nothing is missing in his career. But oh, man, how better can you describe your career after that? Oh, my God, he'd be the king of all kings."

HAMILTON WAS JUST 13 WHEN HE SIGNED A driver's deal with McLaren in 1998. During his stint with F2 and F3, Hamilton raced for team principal Frédéric Vasseur, whose management style and ability to recruit top engineering talent to his lower-level operation impressed the young driver. Hamilton figured Vasseur would be an F1 leader one day.

In the meantime, Hamilton jumped to Mercedes, a middling team that he lifted to championship heights, yet always maintained cordial relations with Ferrari leadership. He'd walk past the Ferrari garage at races, say "Ciao" to the mechanics, and hear them say "Vieni Ferrari" ("Come to Ferrari"). Around 2018, Hamilton met with Ferrari chairman John Elkann. Both sides expressed a desire to see Hamilton in red. But by the end of the 2020 season, Hamilton had four straight championships with Mercedes. He had no reason to jump ship. "I had accepted the fact that I'm probably not going to drive for Ferrari," says Hamilton. "I was OK with that."

Opposite, Lewis spoke with de facto coach Frédéric Vasseur, in 2006; above, at the 2023 Singapore Grand Prix.

After the 2021 season, Hamilton nearly walked away from racing. He—and millions of his fans—felt his record eighth driver title was stolen from him when, during the final race of the year, in Abu Dhabi, an official's controversial decision allowed Verstappen to overtake Hamilton in the last lap and clinch his first title. Hamilton ultimately refused to quit without a fight, but he failed to win a single race as Verstappen cruised to another pair of championships. Hamilton signed a two-year extension with Mercedes in the summer of 2023, but the deal allowed him an option to leave after one year.

True to Hamilton's prediction, his de facto coach in the minors, Vasseur, was hired for a team-principal gig—at Ferrari. Vasseur got wind of the loophole in Hamilton's new deal and aimed to sign an agreement with the driver before the 2024 season. Vasseur wanted his drivers under contract at the time, Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz, to be free of whispers regarding their status. So while Hamilton was at his home in Colorado in December 2023, he got a call from Vasseur asking him to join Ferrari starting in 2025. "I remember getting off the phone and, like, almost shaking," says Hamilton. He told a friend who was with him about the call; they both sat in silence on a bathroom floor in shock.

Breaking up with Mercedes, a team that felt like family, was far from a no-brainer. And he didn't have much time to decide. After taking a walk to clear his head, Hamilton spent a couple of days meditating and consulting with a few family members and trusted friends. He was leaning toward Ferrari. "We're in a time of reimagining the future, reimagining what really dreaming is about," says Hamilton. "I'm going to Ferrari, man, and that's the biggest dream."

Not everyone was so thrilled. The Mercedes team's annual paintball outing came the day after Hamilton informed principal Toto Wolff that he was leaving. When Hamilton arrived, he was too nervous to get out of his car. "These are guys I've been with so many years," he says. He eventually stood on top of a table to address his decision. His squad appeared

Hamilton, here with Vasseur, shocked the racing community when he announced his move to Ferrari.

understanding and supportive. But they let him have it during the game. "They lit me up, hard," says Hamilton. "It was so painful." At one point, he was hiding behind a barrel shooting at the other team when he was struck from behind. A member of his own squadron had nailed him. "Freaking guy," says Hamilton.

IN A BOOK PUBLISHED IN NOVEMBER 2024—*INSIDE Mercedes F1: Life in the Fast Lane*—Wolff says Hamilton's move "helps us because it avoids the moment where we need to tell the sport's most iconic driver that we want to stop. . . . We're in a sport where cognitive sharpness is extremely important, and I believe everyone has a shelf life." The comments caused a stir, and Wolff clarified that Hamilton is still "very sharp."

Hamilton insists Wolff's remark doesn't bother him. He points to athletes like Tom Brady and LeBron James, who've achieved success into their forties. "Don't ever compare me to anybody else," says Hamilton. "I'm the first and only Black driver that's ever been in this sport. I'm built different. I've been through a lot. I've had my own journey. You can't compare me to another 40-year-old, past or present, Formula 1 driver in history. Because they are nothing like me. I'm hungry, driven, don't have a wife and kids. I'm focused on one thing, and that's winning. That's my No. 1 priority."

He also dismisses criticism from the broader racing community. Former F1 team owner Eddie Jordan (who died in early 2025) said in a podcast that it was "absolutely suicidal" for Ferrari to drop Sainz from its roster, given the strong working relationship between him and Leclerc. (Sainz now races for Williams.) "I've always welcomed the negativity," says Hamilton. "I never, ever reply to any of the older, ultimately, white men who have commented on my career and what they think I should be doing. How you show up, how you present yourself, how you perform slowly dispels that."

Others, including former Ferrari driver Jacky Ickx, have suggested that Ferrari signed Hamilton primarily for his commercial value. "I think it's really unfair to Lewis, some of the comments saying, 'This is a marketing operation,' " says Elkann, the Fer-

rari chairman. "Truth said, Lewis doesn't need that. Ferrari doesn't need that. What we need to do is win championships and do great things on the track. If that happens, what we can do outside of the track, in some ways, takes care of itself."

THE PRESSURE, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL, Hamilton faces is immense. No F1 team owns more constructor titles than Ferrari, but they last won in 2008. Ferrari also owns the driver record, with 15, but the last Ferrari driver to win an individual crown was Kimi Räikkönen, in 2007. Ferrari supporters are so passionate that they go by their own name, the *tifosi* (fans). At the Ferrari museum, not far from the team's 9.3 million-square-foot campus in Maranello, Italy, pilgrims often start crying, or propose marriage, in the Hall of Victories, which showcases the team's championship cars and more than 100 trophies.

Hamilton first spotted himself in a Ferrari suit while in, of all places, the loo. He was washing his hands and looked up into the mirror. "I'm in red, I'm like, Whoa!" he says. He paused for a moment to take in the reflection. He liked what he saw. "The suit looked so good on me," says Hamilton, laughing. "I'm like, Damn." When seated in a Ferrari race car for the first time, he closed his eyes when the engine started and smiled. "The vibrations are different," he says.

THE FIRST TIME HAMILTON WAS SEATED IN A FERRARI RACE CAR, HE CLOSED HIS EYES AND SMILED. "THE VIBRATIONS ARE DIFFERENT," HE SAYS.

Hamilton is well aware that Italian sports fans have not always been so welcoming of Black athletes like himself, and Ferrari's diversity—or lack thereof—was a concern. In the wake of George Floyd's 2020 murder, as part of the worldwide sports protest movement against racial injustice, Hamilton started the Hamilton Commission to offer recommendations for more Black representation in U.K. motorsports. Mercedes launched its own diversity initiative in the months that followed and began hiring personnel from underrepresented groups, including Black engineers. "I did think, Oh my God, I've finally got a more diverse working environment that we've built over time," says Hamilton. "And now I'm going back to the beginning of my time with Mercedes, where it wasn't diverse."

Along with every other F1 team, Ferrari signed a Diversity and Inclusion charter in November 2024, and Hamilton is confident that the Scuderia is committed to inclusion. Vasseur, Hamilton's new boss, agrees that the topic is an important one, though he suggests that it may not be his top goal. "It's not politically correct, but first is performance," he says.

OFF THE TRACK, HAMILTON'S SCHEDULE HAS remained plenty full. A Fashion Week and red-carpet regular, he has his own production company, a Dior line, and other enterprises. He says he's in the preliminary stages of developing scripts for a comedy—it doesn't involve racing—and a film pertaining to pets. (That's all he'll offer.) But the biggest thing on the horizon, besides, of course, the 24 Grand Prix races in the season, is the upcoming *F1* movie, starring Brad Pitt, on which Hamilton served as a producer.

Tom Cruise had first connected Hamilton with *F1*'s director, Joseph Kosinski, because Hamilton had expressed an interest in an acting role in *Top Gun: Maverick*. Kosinski was ready to bring the driver on board, but Hamilton was still fighting for championships with Mercedes and couldn't afford the time off. Cruise screened the movie, which grossed $1.5 billion worldwide upon its 2022 release, for Hamilton in London. "I was crying a bit inside," Hamilton says. "Ah, that could have been me!"

So when Kosinski called Hamilton about his F1 project, Hamilton jumped at the chance to be a producer. He participated in the casting process, offered feedback, and pushed for Hans Zimmer, composer of *The Lion King, Gladiator, Dune*, and other hits, to score the film. His close relationship with F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali, a former Ferrari team principal, helped the filmmakers gain access to F1 tracks and races to shoot scenes. "We would not have been able to do this without him," says Kosinski.

As energized as Hamilton is about the movie, he's even more so about racing. In other words, unlike Aroma, whose presence does not seem to have triggered Hamilton's allergies at all, he has no plans to slow down. "What I can tell you is, retirement is nowhere on my radar," says Hamilton. "I could be here until I'm 50. Who knows?" ◻

Max Verstappen celebrated his win at the Bahrain Grand Prix in 2024.

WHAT FUELS MAX'S SUCCESS

The youngest driver to start and win a Formula 1 race, the outspoken, hypercompetitive Max Verstappen has won dozens of Grand Prix races and is one of the most controversial figures in the sport.

BY SEAN GREGORY

MAX VERSTAPPEN WAS GIGGLING LIKE A THIRD-grader while crashing a toy truck. The planet's top Formula 1 driver, who'd won four straight world championships and crushed all comers during the 2023 season, was on the Austin campus of Oracle, the lead sponsor for his Red Bull racing team. As part of his responsibilities, Verstappen was being pinballed from event to event, where he and his teammates had to glad-hand Oracle employees and customers a few days before the city's Grand Prix. It's the sort of stuff Verstappen, who's happiest speeding at more than 200 m.p.h. down a track, can grow tired of, fast.

The day's organizers had baked in a little childlike fun for the drivers, setting up a track on a grass field so Verstappen and his mates could race remote-controlled trucks. What was supposed to be friendly competition, however, quickly devolved into a race to see who could inflict the most damage. Verstappen, to get an edge in the ridiculous competition, climbed atop a van for a better view. "It just comes natural to me to start thinking about these little advantages," he said the next day, during an interview in the Red Bull hospitality area at the Circuit of the Americas, the site of the F1 race. "I like to win."

Racing courses through Verstappen's veins. His Dutch father, Jos, drove in F1 from 1994 to 2003, collecting two podium finishes. His Belgian mother, Sophie Kumpen, was a champion go-karter. (His parents split in 2008.) Jos got Max a quad bike—a motorcycle with four large wheels—when he was 2, growing up in Belgium. Max began go-karting before he was 5.

Once young Max showed an affinity for racing, Jos went all in. He built the engines for Max's karts, served as mechanic, and drove with his son, for 13 hours at a time, to tracks throughout Europe. If rain drenched a track, most families went home. Jos made Max keep practicing. "From a young age, I saw other kids running around, playing, not really thinking about the future," says Max. "But my dad, he had a plan. And I had to stick to the plan."

The younger Verstappen graduated from karts to cars in 2014, when he joined Formula 3, the third-tier circuit, at 16. Helmut Marko, an influential Red Bull adviser, caught a few of his wins on TV. "He was on another planet," says Marko, who called Jos. "I said, 'Jos, forget everything. We do Formula 1.'"

Verstappen spent the 2015 season with Scuderia Toro Rosso, then Red Bull's junior team. At 17, he was the youngest driver ever to line up on the F1 grid, by nearly two years. In 2016, he was promoted to the main team. F1 driver Daniel Ricciardo, then his teammate, still remembers Verstappen's first practice session. "He didn't really care about taking a pragmatic approach," says Ricciardo. "He was like, 'I'm just gonna go and drive this thing and try to drive the wheels off of it. If I crash, I crash.'" Verstappen, who indeed was known for being crash-prone, won.

Yet soon, he was being hailed as his generation's most promising—and fiercest—driver, perhaps even the next Lewis Hamilton, the winningest driver in F1 history. In some ways Verstappen was an unlikely heir. Where Hamilton was affable and media-friendly, Verstappen was cold. Hamilton reveled in Fashion Week, boasted a long list of A-list pals, and had 39 million followers on Instagram. Verstappen had little appetite for the celebrity circuit. In 2021, the two clashed in an epic duel. The season came down to the last lap in Abu Dhabi, where Verstappen overtook Hamilton to win his first title.

Verstappen has rarely disappointed since. In 2022, he won 15 Grand Prix races and followed that up with a record 19 wins in 2023, including 10 victories in a row. In 2024, he added nine more Grand Prix winners' trophies to his collection. Verstappen attributes his success to a happy home life. He's dated Kelly Piquet, the daughter of three-time F1 champion Nelson Piquet, since 2020, and bonded with the 5-year-old daughter Piquet shares with Daniil Kvyat, the driver Verstappen replaced on the Red Bull roster. "I'm not the father; that's not the aim," says Verstappen. "But I see her every day when I'm at home. We get on very well. She's very cute." (Piquet and Verstappen had their first child together in May 2025.)

But when he returns to his home in Monaco—and even to his hotel rooms during race weeks—it's not like he takes a break from racing. His most fervent hobby is simulated racing; he even runs an e-sports team. "I watch other sports but there's nothing really that I'm really passionate about," he says. Piquet respects his side hustle but has her limits. "There have been times where I've been like, 'Okay, time to switch off,'" she says. "You have to give a gentle reminder that the sun is shining outside and, you know, there are other things to do."

FANS TIRED OF VERSTAPPEN'S RUN may be pleased to know he's considered leaving F1. He's not waxing poetic about all-time records, like breaking the mark for most F1 titles in a career—seven—held by Hamilton and Michael Schumacher. "Would I like to win seven? Yeah, why not?" he says. "But even if I don't win seven, I know that there's still so many more things in life than F1. I'm already very happy with what I have achieved."

Verstappen's also growing weary of F1's

Opposite: With his father, Jos, at an early karting competition. Above: Celebrating his first world title in Abu Dhabi, 2021.

focus on marketing, which has undoubtedly fattened his wallet (his contract reportedly pays him some $50 million per year). "I would just keep in mind that the actual sport comes first, instead of the show," he says. "That, for me, is very important, and that eventually will also decide if I stay or not."

Back at the endless meet-and-greets in Austin, Verstappen was accommodating. But there were only so many he could take. He was asked to play rock-paper-scissors—twice. One guy asked for the Dutch pronunciations of *Broadway* and *Brooklyn*. Verstappen played along, albeit reluctantly. "I think it's better just to pronounce it in English," he said. By race day, he'd had his fill. About an hour before the start, he was visited in the Red Bull garage by Prince Harry. Verstappen gave him a quick greeting. "I'm not a people pleaser," he said. "I mean, super-nice guy. And it's good to shake hands, say hello. But I'm here to do my job."

"He should have come earlier," quipped Jos.

Verstappen started the race sixth but patiently climbed the leaderboard, despite some dissatisfaction. "Mate, these brakes are so sh-t compared to yesterday," he radioed to his race engineer. He snapped when his engineer updated him. "Please, no talking, I'm in the braking [zone]," he yelled at one point. With a few laps to go, the engineer informed him he had a 3.6-second lead over Hamilton. "No talking in the braking, man," Verstappen said. "F-ck!"

After his victory, Verstappen noted that he was at least polite ("I said 'please' when I asked.") and said he was unperturbed by the boos he received from some in the stands. "Yeah, very heartbroken," he smiled, with sarcasm. "The thing you have to remember is that when I'm walking off with the trophy, that's the most important thing."

Did he have any message for those fans? "Nope. No. They don't deserve it." With that, he walked toward the Red Bull garage for a team debriefing. On to the next race. On to the next victory. ◻

—With reporting by Leslie Dickstein and Julia Zorthian

Women on Track

A new series, founded by F1, is cultivating a generation of dashing, daredevil female racers.

BY KRISTEN O'BRIEN

Former professional driver Susie Wolff wants other women to know there is a place for them in motor racing, particularly Formula 1, the popular and glamorous international racing series historically associated with male drivers.

Her plan to reach her goal? F1 Academy, an all-women series founded by F1 that kicked off in 2023. The debut season featured seven events around the world, with the final race in October, at the Circuit of the Americas in Austin. "We've been given this great opportunity by Formula 1 to create something which can drive impactful change in this industry," said Wolff, 40, who serves as managing director of the academy.

Born in Scotland, Wolff first started racing karts at 8 years old against the likes of Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg. She went on to race for seven years in the German Touring Car Championship and started working with Williams in 2012. After being a test driver, she became the first woman to participate in a race weekend in 22 years, in 2014. But Wolff retired a year later at age 32, saying she did not think her goal of racing in Formula 1 would happen. (If Wolff looks familiar, it may be because you've seen her on Netflix's *Formula 1: Drive to Survive* series, in which she appears in scenes with her husband, Toto Wolff, principal and CEO of the Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team.)

The F1 Academy, which features six teams and 18 women from all over the world ranging in age from 16 to 25, was created to develop and prepare young female drivers for higher levels of competition—including Formula 1, Formula 2, and Formula 3. In terms of experience, the drivers are classified as Formula 4 level, with hopes of rising to Formula 1, which is the top level achievable in the sport.

Conventional wisdom has it that Formula 1 has long been closed to women—and in fact, in the sport's history, only a handful of women have competed, including Maria Teresa de Filippis, the first woman to drive for Formula 1, who competed from 1958 to 1959. She was followed by Lella Lombardi, Divina Galica, and Desiré Wilson in the '70s and '80s, with Giovanni Amati the last woman to compete, in 1992.

The lack of visible role models is one thing Wolff hopes to correct. "There are a lot of very successful women in this paddock. It's just that they're not camera-facing," Wolff told *People*. "It's not segregated. It's one of the few sports in the world [that isn't]."

Nevertheless, when F1 Academy graduate Bianca Bustamante, a 19-year-old from the Philippines, was asked who her role model was, she excitedly named Niki Lauda, the three-time Formula 1 World Drivers' Champion from Austria. "I grew up watching him; he was to me the epitome of a champion. He was skillful, he was witty, he was incredibly talented," she said.

Having made her debut during the Belgian round of the Italian F4 Championship at Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps in May 2023, Bustamante is sometimes cited as one of the new generation of female drivers who young girls and other fans look up to. "I found my calling in life very early," said Bustamante, who was in her very first kart at the age of 3. "By the time I was 5, I was already competing and had gone on to win national titles," she said.

When Bustamante was growing up and her dad was away, it was up to her mother to help keep her dream alive. "My mom had to take care of me, but not just me. She had to take care of a driver as well. So she would push me to go to the gym. She was like, 'I'm tough on you because the world's gonna be even tougher, so I want you to get up there and face the world without fear,' " the driver recalled. "And because of that, I became fearless." She said she has continued to live a disciplined life, spending most of her time working out, studying engineering, or driving, because the "days that you're resting, your competitors are working hard."

Bustamante participated in the F1 Academy for two years and graduated in December 2024. Though she said her goal was to make it to F1 "purely because I have the speed and I have the talent and hard work to make it there," she acknowledged that it could be a "long journey." She has since left the team and decided instead to race in the GB3 Championship in the U.K. for Elite Motorsport.

As women drivers continue to rise through the ranks with the F1 Academy, Wolff said now "is a moment in time where women's sport is really gaining momentum," while adding that she was hopeful for "a catalyst to nurture talent and help it on its way."

That turning point may not be far off, especially now that the F1 Academy drivers seem to be getting support and attention from within the sport. During the event at Circuit of the Americas, Lewis Hamilton, then with Mercedes, was seen in the women's paddock area and later congratulated driver

In 2014, Wolff became the first woman driver to take part in an official F1 practice session in 22 years.

Marta García on becoming the first F1 Academy champion, while George Russell, also of Mercedes, presented trophies for one of the races. Hollywood has gotten on board as well: Celebrities, such as Gayle King, Drew Barrymore, and Chloë Grace Moretz, were all in Austin to support the women's series.

Soon, women's races will be seen on-screen, as the F1 Academy has inked its own deal with Reese Witherspoon's Hello Sunshine for an "adrenaline-fueled, story-driven docuseries follow[ing] all 15 drivers across the five F1 Academy teams, offering exclusive, behind-the-scenes access," Formula 1 announced in May 2023.

"F1 Academy is going to drive change in the motorsport industry as we create the best possible structure to find and nurture female talent both on and off the racetrack. We want to inspire women around the world to follow their dreams," Wolff said in a statement at the time, noting that the partnership with the Oscar winner's production company — which filmed the entire weekend in Austin — will allow them to "reach a global audience and empower the next generation of young women to break down barriers in motorsport and beyond."

After the F1 Academy wrapped up its final event of the season, the 2024 series was not that far off, with the drivers starting back up in Saudi Arabia. The schedule—which, according to the racing series, was designed to "align with the F1 calendar, creating an opportunity for female drivers to participate in Formula 1 weekends"—also included first-time stops in Miami, Qatar, and Singapore, with Zandvoort and Barcelona returning for a second year for a mix of street circuits and traditional circuits.

Down the road, Wolff said that she hoped to connect more with local communities to usher in change. "We're going to really do impactful work to make the sport seem more accessible and inspire the next generation of teammates," she said. "But fundamentally," she wanted everyone to know that "there is a place for women in this sport."

Pitt with costar Damson Idris and F1 driver Carlos Sainz at the Silverstone Circuit, home of the British Grand Prix and one of the fastest tracks on the F1 calendar.

F1: The Movie

HOLLYWOOD GOES FULL THROTTLE

Warner Bros.'s racing flick, starring Brad Pitt and Javier Bardem, includes speed, thrills, and Lewis Hamilton as coproducer.

BY MADDIE GARFINKLE

BRAD PITT HAS TAKEN THE LEAD—AND THE WHEEL—in *F1*, the new racing drama about a washed-up driver who returns to Formula 1 racing to mentor a promising rookie.

The film, from Apple Original Films, follows Pitt as Sonny Hayes, who retired from F1 in the 1990s after a terrible crash but is lured back to the sport by an old friend and team owner, Ruben Cervantes (Javier Bardem). Cervantes's team, APXGP, is in last place, but he is hoping that his talented new driver, Joshua Pearce (Damson Idris), can elevate APXGP to the top of the grid with mentoring from Hayes.

Fans of Formula 1 are treated to stirring and authentic scenes in the movie, as one of the coproducers was Lewis Hamilton, and all 10 F1 teams, the FIA (F1's governing body), and race promoters were involved in filming, allowing director Joseph Kosinski unprecedented access to the sport. "We're the 11th team," is how Kosinski described the fictional APXGP to Deadline. Hamilton, Max Verstappen, Sergio Pérez, George Russell, Charles Leclerc, Carlos Sainz, Lando Norris, and Oscar Piastri are among the F1 drivers who play themselves. Former Haas F1 team principal Guenther Steiner and three-time Le Mans winner Benoît Tréluyer also have cameos.

Much of *F1* was shot at real Formula 1 tracks, including Silverstone, Hungary, Spa, Monza, Zandvoort, Japan, Las Vegas, and Mexico City. At the 2023 British Grand Prix, the production team got its own garage and lined up its cars on the starting grid along with the real-life contenders. After the Grand Prix in Abu Dhabi, a second podium ceremony was staged to capture some scenes, all in front of fans who were told to stay in their seats.

Pitt and Idris spent months training for *F1* and drive cars in the film that are the products of F1 engineering and Hollywood ingenuity. Both vehicles were built for Apple in collaboration with Mercedes (Hamilton, who was with Mercedes at the time, made the introduction), their design team, and aerodynamicists. Not only was each car custom built to resemble the latest generation Formula 1 car, it was also equipped with 15 camera mounts (cameras built by Sony), as well as recorders, batteries, and transmitters, so that Kosinski could record action on the track—sometimes at speeds of 180 m.p.h. "We've got Brad and Damson actually driving the cars, which is pretty spectacular in itself, but to do that in front of a live audience and at the speeds they're doing it and figuring out a way to capture it. . . . The logistics of it are unlike anything I've done before," said Kosinski, who paired with producer Jerry Bruckheimer to create *F1*.

By shooting at actual Grands Prix in 10- to 15-minute slots between laps in practice and qualifying sessions, Kosinski was able to capture the excitement and stress of live racing. "There are certain aspects of this film where we're working in very, very tight windows, shooting on the track, in front of hundreds of thousands of people," Kosinski told Deadline. He had drivers ready to go with tires warmed and cameras rolling as soon as the real-life track action ended. "It really brings an intensity, and everyone's leaning forward in a way that maybe you wouldn't on a normal shoot day," Kosinski said. "You can just see the adrenaline going beforehand, and you feel that in the performances."

This is not the first time Formula 1 has been the subject of a Hollywood film. The classic is *Grand Prix* (1966), a fictionalized version of the 1966 F1 season that starred James Garner, Eva Marie Saint, and Yves Montand. Like Apple's F1 film, *Grand Prix* included real-life racing footage and cameo appearances by F1 champions, such as Phil Hill, Graham Hill, Juan Manuel Fangio, Jim Clark, Jochen Rindt, and Jack Brabham. There was also *Rush* (2013), directed by Ron Howard, which recreated the 1976 F1 season and the battle for the title between James Hunt (Chris Hemsworth) and Niki Lauda (Daniel Brühl). More recently, *Ford v Ferrari* (2019) followed a team of engineers hired by Henry Ford II and Ford executive Lee Iacocca to build a race car to defeat Ferrari at the 1966 Le Mans race in France, while *Ferrari* (2023) was based on the life of Enzo Ferrari, with stars including Adam Driver.

Kosinski, who worked previously with Bruckheimer on *Top Gun: Maverick*, decided to try his hand at *F1* after getting hooked, like many Americans, on the Netflix series *Drive to Survive* during

F1 drivers Charles Leclerc and George Russell, Pitt, and Javier Bardem filming during the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, 2024.

the pandemic. Part of the appeal of the sport, Kosinski told Nerds of Color, a pop-culture website, was the fact that F1 teammates are also competitors. He also said he liked how the first season of the show focused on the teams in last place rather than centering on those at the front of the pack, such as Ferrari, Mercedes, and Red Bull. "I thought that there was an interesting story to be told about an underdog team in trying to not win the championship but just trying to win one race against these titans of the sport. So that's where it started," Kosinski said. He got in touch with Lewis Hamilton, and the process unfolded from there.

Eventually Pitt signed on, as did actors Bardem, Simone Ashley, Kerry Condon, Tobias Menzies, Sarah Niles, and Samson Kayo. From day one, Kosinski felt he was on the right track. That's when he, Pitt, and Hamilton got together and tried different race cars. It "was one of those things I'll never forget," the director said, "having Lewis Hamilton as your driving instructor. But what we learned, and what Louis was saying, you know, was did Brad know how to drive? Because if Brad can't drive, this whole film wasn't going to work. And what Lewis was very happy to discover was that, you know, Brad had a lot of just natural ability right from the start." ◻

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THE ROAD THEY TRAVELED

In the aughts, Formula 1 was plagued by accidents and losing teams, and was struggling with its finances. Then the sport engineered a turnaround.

Ayrton Senna,
1990.

AYRTON SENNA'S LEGACY

The iconic Brazilian driver brought heart and emotion to the racetrack in the late 1980s and '90s. But it was his tragic death that changed Formula 1 by prompting the sport to overhaul safety regulations.

BY JAKE KRING-SCHREIFELS

ON MAY 1, 1994, AT THE START OF THE seventh lap at Italy's San Marino Grand Prix, 34-year-old Ayrton Senna da Silva crashed his newly designed Williams race car into a concrete wall at 145 m.p.h. Later that day, the Formula 1 driver, winner of three championships, was pronounced dead at a local hospital, sending shock waves throughout the racing world and his home country of Brazil.

The event makes up the first brief sequence in *Senna*, a six-episode Netflix miniseries that traces the majority of his adult racing life and his ascent to the top of his sport. In the process of achieving greatness on the track (he finished his 10-year career with 41 victories, 65 pole positions, and 80 podiums), Senna became one of the few drivers to transcend the sport itself—he was both a global superstar and a national hero to Brazilians, who gathered around televisions every time he strapped into his car and flipped down his helmet lid. When he drove, everyone watched.

Across the series, showrunner and codirector Vicente Amorim chronicles the creation of his almost mythic celebrity and the challenging ladder he climbed to reach the sport's ultimate heights. Like most elite athletes, Senna, played with fierce determination by Gabriel Leone, inherited an early love for racing and paired it with his inflexible, determined personality, an unrelenting desire to be the best, which shaped his relationships with family, teammates, and competitors. As he graduated from different levels of racing and made his way to F1 in 1984, he possessed extreme command in the driver's seat, exhibited aggressiveness at every opportunity, and proved he could win at any level, on any surface, against any opponent.

You might already know some of this journey and background if you watched the identically titled *Senna*, director Asif Kapadia's engrossing and award-winning 2010 documentary that's also available on Netflix. In a break from typical documentary form, Kapadia exclusively used archival home and racing

footage, sacrificing talking heads for a more intimate and immediate account of Senna's driving prowess and quest for greatness as he moved between racing teams and navigated Formula 1's politics. Though the miniseries dramatizes many of the same moments, it also fills in some of the off-track gaps that Kapadia leaves out, including Senna's first marriage, his early racing career in the U.K., and the intricacies of his rivalry with French driver Alain Prost (Matt Mella).

SENNA'S RISE TO F1 GLORY

Even as a child, Senna had an irregular thirst for driving and began racing go-karts at age 13. Early success motivated him to move to the U.K. in 1981, race with real cars, and pursue Formula motorsports.

As Senna attempted a professional route, his native Brazil was in the midst of a 21-year military dictatorship, which left most of the country in poverty. As unemployment rose, Senna offered many Brazilian residents hope and pride. Amorim and codirector Júlia Rezende occasionally nod to Brazil's struggles in various newspaper headlines and television reports, as well as during a few glimpses of a Brazilian father and son who flock to the television when Senna races.

The majority of *Senna's* first two episodes chronicles his growth as a driver in England. Though his win-first, aggressive tactics don't ingratiate him to his team, Senna still wins the Formula Ford series championship in his first year. He initially retires to appease his wife, Lillian, and his parents, who want him to take over the family business, but his instant success pulls him back to England. It's not long before he ditches a life in Brazil, separates from Lillian, and continues his climb up the Formula ladder.

In the midst of Senna's migration between teams, Amorim highlights some of the biases facing Latino athletes. After Senna wins the F3 championship, Formula 1 teams—specifically Lotus—begin taking notice. But no matter his impressive lap times, the majority of executives refuse to give Senna a fair shake. "He's just not British," says a higher-up at Imperial Tobacco, a Lotus title sponsor.

Eventually, Senna latches on with Toleman, a smaller outfit that doesn't have the car design or engine to compete with the top F1 brands. And yet, during his first year, he proves his skills. "It's like a drug," Senna says after finding early success. "Once you experience it, you keep searching for it all the time."

THE RIVALRY IS BORN

It's difficult to capture the thrill and danger of Formula 1 and condense it onto the small screen, but Amorim effectively translates the feeling inside the cockpit. Leaning on a soundtrack of accelerating engines and gear changes, he deftly drops in archival overhead shots of races with the hyper-focused close-ups of his own camera, blending CGI and real cars to match the sport's blistering pace and Senna's stomach-turning corner hugging. At points during his championship runs, the Brazilian describes the experience of driving like he was "in another dimension," and Senna commits to that out-of-body dimension with abstract, kinetic energy.

As Senna develops into first a feisty driver at Toleman and then a threatening one at Lotus, Prost had become the face of the racing world at McLaren. The pair would soon forge a rivalry, though their frosty relationship didn't crystallize until they became McLaren teammates in 1988. At one point in the season, Senna shoved Prost toward a pit wall, and their rivalry remained contentious as Senna's star began to outshine Prost's en route to the Brazilian's first F1 championship.

The intensive public battle didn't start until 1989, when Senna passed Prost at Imola during a restart, breaking what Prost believed to be a gentleman's agreement. Over the next two years, each engaged in title-deciding crashes by cutting corners and tarnishing F1's reputation, with Senna calling out Prost's political maneuvering and

Opposite: Senna participated in the World Karting Championship in Sweden, 1982. Above: Senna's car was removed from the track at Imola, where he was killed.

Prost griping about Senna's impulsive driving. The rivals became friendly once Prost left for a broadcasting role, but their relationship fueled F1 storylines for years and made their races must-watch events.

AN END FORESHADOWED

At the beginning of the 1994 race season, Senna could foresee a tragedy on the horizon. At the time, he was unhappy with his Williams car (which had recently lost its automatic suspensions and gearboxes thanks to a series-wide ban) and didn't trust the San Marino track. His concerns before his final race grew during the Friday qualifier, when driver Rubens Barrichello, Senna's friend and fellow Brazilian, flipped his car and hit a tire barrier, necessitating an airlift to a hospital where he was diagnosed with a broken nose and bruising. The next day, Austrian driver Roland Ratzenberger died instantly after ramming into a concrete barrier due to a front wing failure.

Senna felt the gravity of these moments. In the final episode, he calls for the F1 president to postpone the Grand Prix, one of many occasions when the driver questioned Formula 1's leadership. That same weekend, Prost urges him to lead the Drivers' Association because of the pull he has with other drivers and the leverage he has as the sport's biggest name.

Ultimately, those tragedies didn't dissuade Senna from competing. In a pivotal scene before the race, Senna's doctor, Sid Watkins, asks him why he has to keep racing. Senna responds: "Sid, there are certain things over which we have no control. I cannot quit, I have to go on." In the wake of his death, Formula 1 made renewed efforts to improve its safety measures, which included limitations placed on the bodywork aerodynamics of cars and a pit lane speed limit. As a result, it was 21 years between Senna's death and that of Jules Bianchi, who died in 2015 from injuries sustained at the Japanese Grand Prix.

But Senna's legacy extends beyond the track. His family established the Instituto Ayrton Senna, a charitable foundation he had wanted to form with his sister, Viviane, before competing in 1994. Throughout his career, he'd made large donations to aid impoverished Brazilian children and wanted a unified place to focus on education and human development for the next generation. Today, Viviane is the nonprofit's president and is dedicated to helping disadvantaged youth in the memory of her brother. ◻

THE TURBULENT TIMES OF FORMULA 1

In 2010, TIME reported how big numbers and gaudy pageantry were masking the series's problems.

BY JOSH LEVINE

ON A CRISP DAY IN VALENCIA, SPAIN, IN 2010, A SMALL man in a cardinal-red jumpsuit walked a few steps from a million-dollar motor home and ducked into a lavish hospitality tent, both in the same bright scarlet. No one was allowed anywhere near him, but throngs of Spanish fans hanging over the railing of Valencia's Ricardo Tormo racetrack went crazy. "Look up here, Fernando! Te quiero, Fernando!"

It was the first appearance of Fernando Alonso, the Spanish racer and former world champion, as a driver for Ferrari's Formula 1 team. Whenever Alonso briefly poked his head out, crowds hooted wildly and waved red Ferrari hats and Spanish flags. Further down the paddock, where the F1 teams park their massive rolling pavilions, journalists were shoving microphones and cameras at another man, this one all in silver. Michael Schumacher, the seven-time F1 world champion, was coming out of retirement in the livery of his new Mercedes team. The questions were not tough: "How does the car feel, Michael?" "I feel like a kid with a new toy," replied Schumi. Several dozen blogs and tweets in half a dozen languages instantly analyzed what Schumi meant by this.

The F1 circus was in town for its annual preseason trials. It was only a test session, but it gave a good idea why F1 was one of the big-

Michael Schumacher, driving for Mercedes, crashed into the back of Jean-Éric Vergne at the Singapore Grand Prix in 2012.

gest sporting enterprises in the world—part medieval joust, part moon launch. The pennants bearing each team's coat of arms flapped jauntily from trucks that housed enough computing power to send a man into orbit. The mix of techno-dazzle and hometown pride helped explain why 40,000 fans had turned out at Ricardo Tormo to watch a non-race with no winner.

The question was, would they keep coming? In 2009, advertisers, fans, teams and media spent $4.6 billion on F1's festival of fossil fuel. Six hundred million people around the world watched some part of the season on television. That's why companies such as Korean electronics conglomerate LG Group were prepared to lay out "several hundred million dollars" to have their logos plastered all over F1, said Andrew Barrett, the company's VP of global sponsorship, who in 2010 had just inked such a deal. "We were looking for as broad a global reach as we could get with one sport, and nothing else even came close."

But what the big numbers and the gaudy pageantry hid was how close the sport had come to a total crack-up the prior year, and just how rickety it remained. At times in the early aughts, Formula 1 looked as ungovernable as California: big teams quit, and more threatened to do so; the financial industry canceled its lifeblood sponsorship almost en masse; track attendance was down; and scandals had tarnished everyone from a world champ to the former head of motorsport itself. Bernie Ecclestone, the septuagenarian usually described as F1's principal stakeholder, insisted that all was well with the world. "The sport's in better shape than it's ever been," he told TIME. "The negative things are all ironed out." But others had a more somber, realistic view of the state of F1. "The sport has been damaged. We were firefighting our way through last year and we still have to finish firefighting," said Martin Whitmarsh, who was running the powerhouse McLaren team. "It's time for this sport to grow up."

MORE DASH THAN CASH

The prior summer, in 2009, it looked like the sport might cease to exist altogether. Angry at Formula 1's decision to impose a team-spending cap, Ferrari, the oldest team on the grid, threatened to lead the biggest marques in a rival series. The teams pulled back at the last minute but demanded that Max Mosley, the president of the governing Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), stand down after 17 years. Mosley did.

Mosley's concession didn't stop car manufacturers like Toyota and BMW from pulling out of the sport anyway. (Honda had quit at the end of 2008.) That left only three major carmakers—Ferrari (owned by Fiat), Mercedes-Benz, and Renault—still in F1. "The sport just wasn't delivering the value,"

Opposite: 2008 Singapore Grand Prix winner Fernando Alonso celebrated with his Renault team.
Above: Bernie Ecclestone, in sunglasses, and Max Mosley, at the Belgian Grand Prix, 1982.

said John Howett, head of Toyota Motorsports. For the 2010 season, some of the old names were replaced by entrepreneurs with more dash than cash. Ecclestone called entrants "out of their depth" before the season even started, while Ferrari's official website complained about the "much reduced" pace shown by newbies like Virgin and Lotus in testing. No one expected all of them to make it through their first season.

Then there were the scandals—some turbocharged doozies. First, in 2007, McLaren was fined $100 million after an engineer was caught with documents supplied by a rogue Ferrari employee. In 2009, one of F1's most flamboyant team managers, Renault's Flavio Briatore, was barred from the sport for life after the FIA determined that he had ordered one of his drivers to crash in a 2008 race to help out Renault's other driver—Alonso, in this case. (In 2010, a French court overturned the ban, which drew an appeal from FIA; in the end, the parties settled out of court). "At times it felt like the whole thing was imploding," said former F1 driver Mark Blundell. "I saw a lot of things I didn't like, and it hurt."

One reason for the meltdown was money. Unlike most other motorsports, F1 was and is as much a battle between engineers as it is a race between drivers. Spurred on by a space-race mentality, F1 teams were research-and-developing themselves into oblivion. "The cost was growing beyond the point where you could have one or two teams," said McLaren's Whitmarsh.

A wind tunnel, for example, was costing close to $40 million to construct, not counting the corps of engineers needed to run it. Average annual team budgets had climbed near $300 million, and the biggest teams were spending $500 million. Sponsorship and prize money rarely brought in half that. "Very few of the teams could actually make any money," said Caroline Reid, coauthor of *Formula Money*, the authoritative guide to F1's finances.

Felipe Massa, driving for Ferrari, at the 2008 Singapore Grand Prix.

It was Mosley's determination to save the sport from itself that led to the crisis of 2009. Frustrated by negotiations that went nowhere, Mosley tried to impose a budget cap of $64 million per team. The teams couldn't figure out which they liked less, the cap or Mosley. "Max has an expression: 'Don't wound if you don't intend to kill,'" said Martin Brundle, a former driver, now a commentator on F1 for television. "We've all been on the receiving end of that attitude, and it tended to smother all Max's good work."

It didn't help that in 2008 Mosley was set up and photographed during a pay-for-pain session with several prostitutes. The pictures were duly splashed across a British tabloid. Mosley sued for invasion of privacy and won, but his moral authority was crippled. "We were within a whisker of reaching a spending agreement in 2008 when Max took the hit," said Adam Parr, the former CEO of the Williams F1 team. "After that, we never managed to get the last piece of the puzzle in place."

Toward the end of the 2009 season, Mosley and the teams finally compromised on something called a Resource Restriction Agreement that took effect in 2010. It wasn't a cap, but it clamped down on runaway costs like wind tunnels and in-season testing. The big teams could still outspend their smaller rivals on, say, computer simulations, but just about everything in F1 was downsizing. It

became possible to field a respectable team, if not a winning one, for $100 million a season.

The teams weren't the only ones who couldn't make ends meet. The promoters behind F1's 19 races saw their fees for hosting an event double to almost $30 million between 2005 and 2010— $45 million for newer races in Abu Dhabi, Singapore, and Korea. As a result, promoters jacked up prices for the best seats over a race weekend to an average of $722, a rise of 50% in three years. Average three-day attendance fell from 187,724 in 2008 to 161, 613 in 2009. "In Bahrain, all you could see in the stands were a few civil servants," said one attendee.

In terms of F1 economics, however—and this was especially true for the newest hosts — it didn't matter if none of F1's race promoters came close to covering costs. The shortfall increasingly was being paid for by host governments who viewed television coverage as a giant commercial for their city or country. Singapore began hosting a spectacular nighttime race on city streets beneath twinkling lights in 2008. That first race took in $51 million, but cost $100 million, according to *Formula Money.* Singapore's government kicked in $60 million, leaving the local promoter with a tidy profit. "Singapore wasn't really on the map, and then they run this F1 night race, show it on TV, and suddenly everyone knows where Singapore is," said Zak Brown, now the CEO of McLaren Racing.

That's a big reason why Formula 1 began moving steadily eastward. When the series started in 1950, on the bumpy tracks of Monza and Silverstone, the championship was a race between European cars mostly driven by European drivers and watched by European fans. The drivers took their lives in their hands every time they got behind the wheel. Many didn't make it. Jackie Stewart, three-time F1 world champion, said he used to look back at his house before leaving to drive at Germany's original Nürburgring in case he never saw it again. "The Nürburgring has 187 corners — it's like Afghanistan," said Stewart.

The famed Nürburgring track has not been on the F1 schedule since 2020. Yas Island in Abu Dhabi still is. The gulf state spent $1 billion on the new track and $39 billion on the outlandish infrastructure surrounding it, including hotels, golf courses, and Ferrari World, billed as the world's largest indoor theme park. There you could experience the g-forces of an F1 racer firsthand on a roller coaster that reaches speeds of 124 m.p.h. (200 km/h). The roller coaster may be more thrilling than the race itself. New tracks like Yas Island seemed to be a soccer mom's dream of safety. But the new tracks could also make for duller races, and many in the sport felt that F1 needed to find a way to boost the thrill factor, if not the casualty count.

In 2010, reflecting Europe's waning influence in F1, the season didn't reach the continent until mid-May, passing first through Bahrain, Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur, and Shanghai. Only eight of the season's 19 races were in Europe; England's legendary Silverstone track almost lost its spot on the schedule altogether. France no longer had a race.

On balance, F1's move eastward was considered good for the sport. In 2009, more than a third of

F1's TV viewers came from China and Brazil alone. "Doing an American team makes a lot of sense as the sport moves away from Europe; those are the markets that American companies want to reach," said Peter Windsor, a former F1 team and sponsor manager who tried, but was unable, to get a USF1 team off the ground. Still, much of the sport's mystique rests on its guts-and-glory past. "It's a little frustrating to go to all these places with no sense of F1's history," said Martin Brundle.

THE OLD MAGIC

Having dodged a hail of bullets in 2009, the barons of Formula 1 were breathing a little easier by 2010. Drivingwise, F1 looked a lot more exciting than it had in years. The 2009 champion, Jenson Button, and 2008 winner Lewis Hamilton, both Brits, were behind the wheel for McLaren. Schumi was back and trying to win another championship at 41. Red Bull, 2009's runner-up in the constructors' race, had a quick young German driver named Sebastian Vettel, whose nickname was Baby Schumi. With Alonso and Felipe Massa on board at Ferrari, the Italian team was again a strong contender, and Ferrari, by general consensus and its own elevated self-image, was the beating red heart of F1. Three out of four fans who followed a team were Ferrari fans.

None of which meant F1 was out of the woods. The audience for the sport was changing, but the sport's culture had not yet caught up. In 2010, F1 was about as likable as a 250-pound bouncer. It was living in a high-tech bubble and thriving on a velvet-rope mentality that kept all but a few very high rollers far away from the cars and the drivers. "F1 has gotten extremely constipated and overly grand for itself," said Jackie Stewart. "When I was a wee boy, I went to the track and got [Juan Manuel] Fangio's autograph. I got Stirling Moss's autograph. It's still a fantastic sport, but it needs more of a feel-good factor."

Retooling itself for an age of scarcity was an important step, and in 2014, Formula E, the first all-electric racing championship series, debuted in China. The series not only attracted support from major automakers like Renault, Volkswagen's Audi division, and Citroën, it was lauded as a place to test ways to work out the challenges of battery-powered transportation, such as range and charging technology.

More change would come down the road with the ousting of Formula 1's most influential figure, Bernie Ecclestone, who was not beloved and didn't try to be. In an interview with the *London Times* in 2009, he appeared to give qualified praise to Adolf Hitler, saying that the German leader "could command a lot of people" and was "able to get things done."

A former driver and team owner, Ecclestone began to exert control over F1 in the late 1970s, when he got a lock on the sale of the sport's TV rights, its most valuable asset. In 2005, he sold most of his stake in Formula 1 Management to private

Opposite: Sebastian Vettel and Michael Schumacher at Wembley Stadium in London, 2008.
Above: Vettel at a practice for the Australian Grand Prix, 2008.

equity firm CVC Capital Partners. But thanks to a complicated ownership structure, he remained the straw that stirs the drink. Ecclestone alone made the big TV, sponsorship, and track deals that kept F1's cash gushing for decades. He rested his legacy on the numbers, and they were indeed impressive, not least his own. At one point, Forbes tallied his personal fortune at $3.7 billion. Ecclestone turned 80 in 2010, but within six years, he would be given his walking papers. With his exit, the question was, When it comes, will a gas-guzzling, money-burning, testosterone-heavy sport still attract the sponsors, promoters, and supporters who keep it going? In Valencia, 40,000 fans at a non-race suggested the answer was yes—a verdict that in the years that followed was reaffirmed many times over.

REWRITING THE RULES

F1 cars—and how they race—are constantly changing.

To keep the cost of running a Formula 1 team in check, prevent teams from leaving; and to make racing more competitive and exciting, the sport's ruling body has brought in a slew of new rules over the past three years. Here are some changes.

2008. Traction-control systems that prevented rear wheelspin are banned, while gearboxes have to last four consecutive races.

2009. To cut costs by 30%, drivers have to use the same engine for three, rather than two, consecutive events, and they are limited to eight engines per season. Engine limits are reduced from 19,000 r.p.m. to 18,000 r.p.m. In-season testing is banned.

2010. Drivers will still make pit stops to change tires, but mid-race refueling is banned, meaning that cars will have to carry 66 gallons (250 liters) of fuel, up from 21 gallons (80 liters) in the past. Aerodynamic testing is cut from eight days to six. A new points system makes a win far more valuable than a safe (but boring) second place. □

F1 Supremo

The rise and fall of Formula 1's czar, Bernie Ecclestone.

BY EILEEN DASPIN

In his heyday, Bernie Ecclestone was known as F1 Supremo, and it was a nickname well deserved.

From the early 1970s until 2017, Ecclestone, a former car dealer from the U.K., transformed Formula 1 from a weekend hobby for racing enthusiasts into the world's most glamorous sport. He harnessed the power of TV. He recognized the potential of sponsorships. He centralized ownership of a loose confederation of teams. And he did so with autocratic flair, in the process amassing a personal fortune at one point valued at $4.5 billion.

As a car dealer, Ecclestone had been known for tactics like running odometers backward and selling bundles of vehicles, sometimes with cars missing. To reengineer Formula 1, he used a similar approach. "The recipe, as ever, was to exploit loopholes," wrote Joshua Robinson and Jonathan Clegg in *The Formula*, a history of the series. Decades into his success, Ecclestone was still bending and breaking the rules. In 2014, the Supremo settled a case brought in Munich accusing him of paying a $44 million bribe to the German banker who approved the sale of F1 rights to a private equity group in 2006, a deal that stipulated Ecclestone retain his lucrative position as boss. In 2022, Ecclestone, then 91, was arrested for illegally carrying a gun while boarding a plane. The following year, he was convicted of fraud for failing to declare millions of pounds to Britain's government; he received a suspended sentence and was ordered to pay $802 million.

"Ecclestone has experienced the kind of sparkling career that might earn someone a knighthood but for the rough edges that occasionally come to light," wrote attorney Robert Goulder in a tax-law newsletter, ticking off Ecclestone's myriad offenses, including the time in 2022 that Ecclestone said he would "take a bullet" for Vladimir Putin. "To be fair, if your business model involves staging automobile races in exotic destinations . . . the act of sucking up to authoritarian governments comes with the turf."

Ecclestone's rag-to-riches story is part of F1 lore. The son of a fishing trawler in Suffolk, Ecclestone grew up poor, in a home without plumbing. Yet he had a nose for wheeling and dealing from a young age. In one oft-told story, Bernie worked two paper rounds before school, used the money to buy sweets from a pastry shop, then resold them at a profit on the playground to his classmates.

With money saved from this routine, Ecclestone bought his first bike, which he upgraded to a motorcycle, and discovered his passion for motors and racing. As England rebuilt after World War II, Ecclestone recognized the need for car and motorcycle parts and built up a business around the trade. He also tried his hand at racing and opened his own dealership, which he eventually parlayed into a showroom for luxury cars in London. He developed a taste for bespoke suits, carried wads of cash, and could often be found in the evenings playing cards at the Mayfair Casino. Ecclestone's showroom became a magnet for celebrity clientele—he once sold a lime green Lamborghini Miura to the It girl, Twiggy—and took on a number of F1 drivers as manager.

Racing at the time was growing in two different directions. On one side were the "garagistas," the independent British teams; on the other were big carmakers like Ferrari, Alfa Romeo, and Renault. Ecclestone seemed to cast his lot with the garagistas when he bought the British racing team Brabham for a reported $120,000. As an owner, he became a member of the Formula One Constructors' Association (FOCA), which met periodically to discuss the sport's issues. It became clear to Ecclestone that change was needed. The owners had technical know-how but not much business acumen. Ownership between race promoters and the International Automobile Federation (FIA), F1's governing body, was murky. Ecclestone saw the potential for the teams to work together, negotiating as a single unit, like a cartel, instead of competing interests.

He began making important friends, including design engineer Colin Chapman, Frank Williams (cofounder of the Williams team), and, perhaps most important, Max Mosley, a barrister and the son of Fascist Oswald Mosley and Diana Mitford, once labeled "the most hated woman in England" for her association with Hitler. (The couple was married at the home of Joseph Goebbels, with Hitler as a guest of honor).

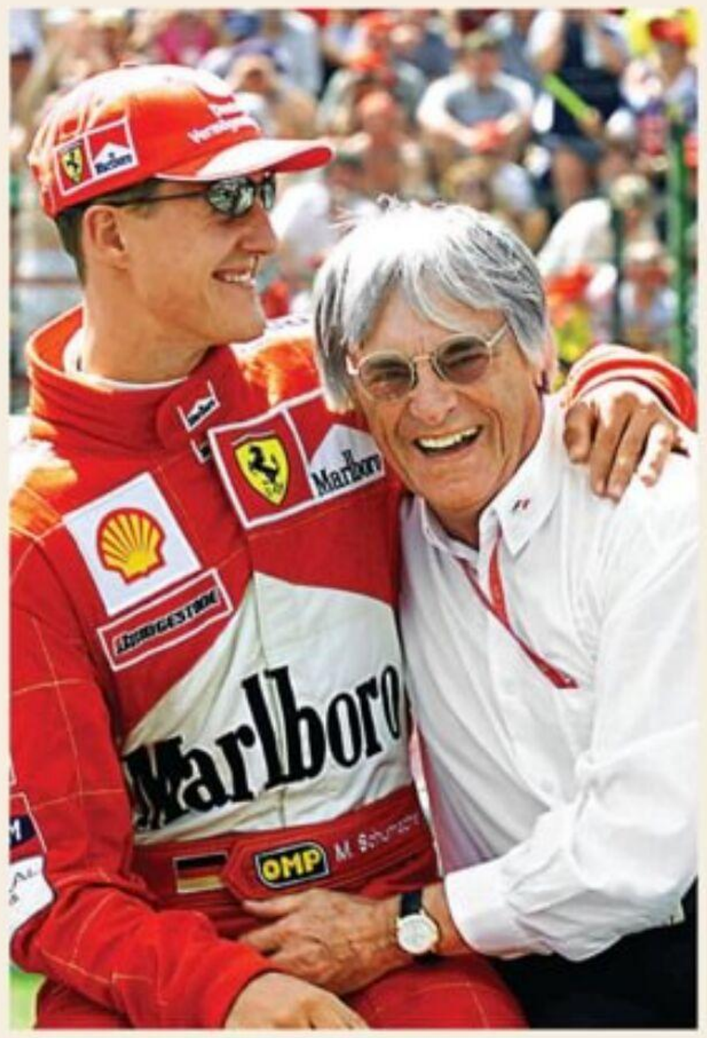
Ecclestone and Mosley were an odd pair but worked well together, and when Ecclestone became the chief executive of FOCA in 1978, he made Mosley his legal advisor. The two centralized the ownership of F1, selling the television rights, which previously had been distributed piecemeal, distributing a proportion of the proceeds to the teams. The owners were grateful, as a small sum was better than the practically nothing they had been getting for years, and ". . . eventually that minor percentage made all the sport's leading participants very rich men indeed," observed Richard Williams in the *Guardian* in 2011.

Ecclestone with Jean-Pierre Jarier at the French Grand Prix, 1976. Below: With Ferrari driver Michael Schumacher, 2000.

"Ecclestone himself, of course, had been getting richer still."

The die was cast. In the years to come, Ecclestone would continue to build F1, moving the sport out of Europe and striking lucrative deals around the globe. In 2000, he negotiated an extraordinary 100-year agreement that granted him commercial rights to F1 for just $360 million. When a private equity group bought majority ownership of F1 in 2006, Ecclestone stayed on as chief executive and continued F1's expansion. One notable deal of the era came in 2010, when Ecclestone convinced the Russian government to pay F1 $280 million to hold an annual grand prix in Sochi, a resort on the Black Sea. The deal was concluded in a private 15-minute meeting between Ecclestone and Vladimir Putin, according to *No Angel: The Secret Life of Bernie Ecclestone* by Tom Bower. (Following the invasion of Ukraine, Liberty Media terminated the contract).

By this point, some felt Ecclestone had lost focus. When Liberty Media bought F1 in 2016, Ecclestone was ousted, though he remained in the news with his various legal woes and outlandish declarations, including a comment about racism that prompted F1 to issue a statement distancing the organization from him. On a happier note, in 2020, the year Ecclestone turned 90, his wife, Fabiana Flosi, 46 years his junior, delivered the couple's first child. They call the baby Ace, for Alexander Charles Ecclestone.



CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Liberty Media bought Formula 1 in 2016 for $8 billion, put pedal to the metal, and revamped the sport.

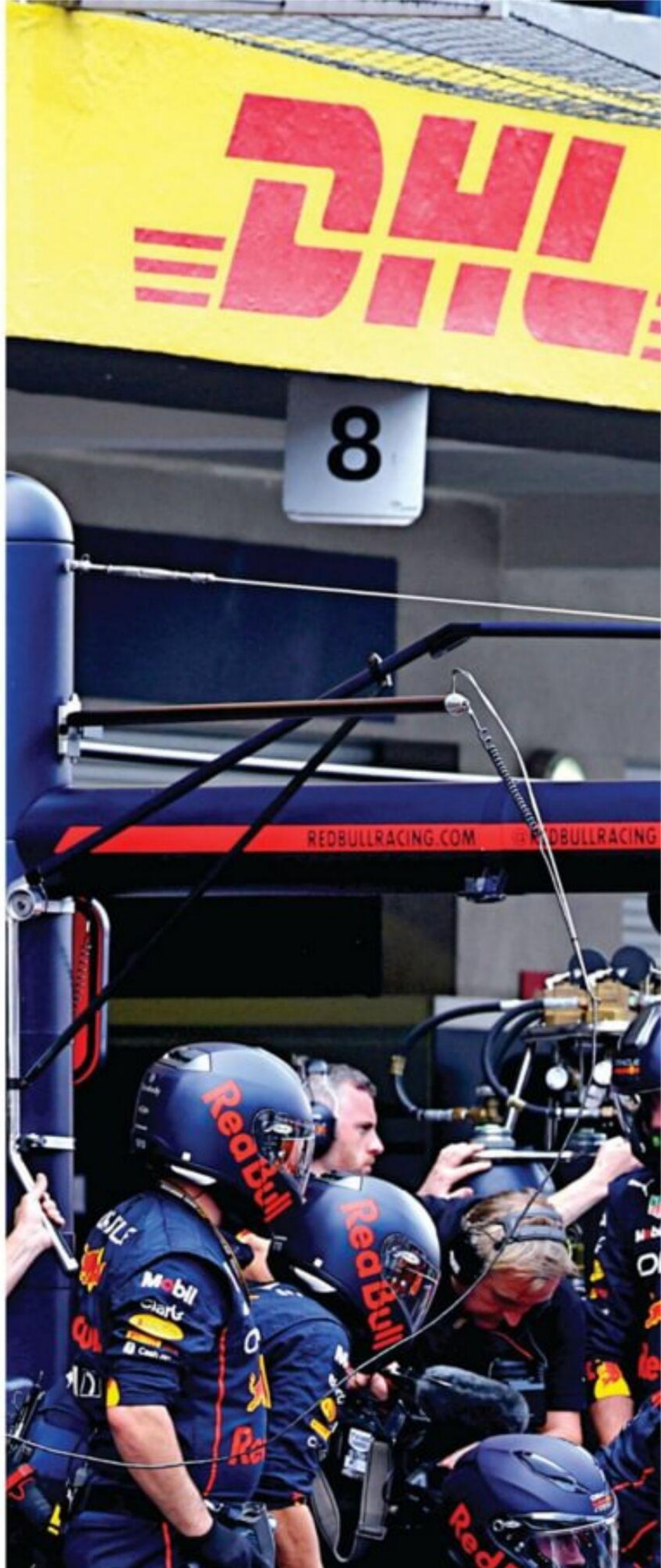
BY CHRIS MEDLAND

NOBODY IS IMMORTAL, BUT WITHIN THE CAR-RACING world, there was a sense that Bernie Ecclestone was close. In 2017, the Formula 1 owner, then 86 years old, was in his fourth decade as the league's boss. He had transformed F1 from a niche sport into a sprawling global empire and was busy running the series in the dictatorial manner of his nickname: F1 Supremo.

At the time, very little within Formula 1 happened without Ecclestone's say—from the sale of hosting rights to the setting of Grand Prix dates—and though he was criticized by some for not keeping up with the times, he had remained in control of the league through multiple changes in ownership.

That was until Liberty Media entered the picture. On the day that Liberty closed the deal buying Formula 1 from a private equity group, Ecclestone, in his own words, was "forced out." Demoted to chairman emeritus, Ecclestone and his services were no longer needed. "That's the reason they bought it," Ecclestone told the BBC, "because they thought I hadn't done a very good job and they could do better, and they probably will."

Removing the Supremo was just the first step in Liberty's aggressive redirection of Formula 1. Having beaten out several deep-



Sergio Pérez, driving for Red Bull, made a pit stop during the 2022 F1 Mexico City Grand Prix.

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pocketed competitors—in negotiations that stretched out for months—Liberty was eager to put its plans in place. Almost immediately, the company set in motion a rebranding of F1. One of the first moves was a logo redesign and a new signature song from the composer of the themes for the Marvel superheroes movies. The media company also installed new leadership, pumped up social media, and, critically, worked to attract a younger audience. It also bet on big, out-of-the-box ideas, like launching an F1 subscription service where fans could stream races live, as well as the Netflix docuseries and pandemic phenom, *Drive to Survive*.

Today, the 2025 version of Formula 1 is almost unrecognizable from its 2016 self. The market cap of the publicly traded Formula 1 Group hovers around $21 billion, and American sponsors fight for advertising space on cars and at high-profile new events in Las Vegas and Miami. Average race viewership on ESPN has nearly doubled, to 1.1 million, since 2018, with social media followers around the globe up fourfold over the same period. Thanks to the intensely fought battle between rival drivers Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton in 2021, TV figures surged, reaching a record high of 1.2 million on average in 2022. Meanwhile, individual teams have seen their individual values rise from the low hundreds of millions to potentially exceeding the $1 billion mark today.

Such explosive growth would be difficult to sustain, and in fact, the momentum has begun to slow. Last year's television viewership in the U.S. was down 8% from its 2022 high, despite a highly competitive season that saw four different teams secure multiple race victories. And although the events in Austin and Miami performed strongly, the second edition of the Las Vegas Grand Prix also suffered from disappointing ticket sales. Formula 1 executives maintain they were not surprised by the plateauing, however, and say that interest in key growth markets continues to be strong, including in the U.S., where the league calculates its fan base has exceeded 50 million, half of whom have started following the sport in the past five years.

IN THE EARLY AUGHTS, FORMULA 1 was not in a good place. Having thrived under Ecclestone since the 1970s, the sport seemed to stall with the new millennium, unable to adapt to changing times. Largely at Ecclestone's direction, Formula 1 was continuing to focus on wealthy fans, as it had for so many years, and prioritizing television over any other media. Though the digital media space was exploding, Ecclestone and other Formula 1 execs were unsure how to navigate the changing landscape—or monetize social media—and so neglected it, along with digital's fresh ways of connecting with young people.

Opposite, top: Formula 1 Group executives, before the Italian Grand Prix, 2018; bottom, Red Bull drivers Max Verstappen (left) and Sergio Pérez (far right), with team principal Christian Horner, celebrated after the Mexico City Grand Prix, 2021. Above: The Las Vegas Grand Prix launch party, 2023.

Even some websites struggled to gain the required accreditation to cover the sport. Making matters worse, Ecclestone was battling scandal on multiple fronts, facing criminal bribery and tax fraud charges at different times, and the sport's majority shareholder, Kirch Media, struggled financially.

In 2006, spotting an opportunity, a private equity group called CVC Capital Partners acquired a majority stake in Formula 1 for $2.1 billion. Helped by Ecclestone's authority and negotiating power, CVC took control of the sport and moved the business forward. The new owners expanded the Formula 1 Group—adding the sponsorship and hospitality business, as well as junior race categories—to bring different revenue streams under the control of one company and focused on what CVC called the "premiumization" of the product.

That's not to say exclusivity was the only aim. Though CVC was never going to give F1 fans the close-up views of the teams and drivers that were characteristic of IndyCar and NASCAR—Ecclestone likened running the F1 track inner sanctum, or paddock, to operating a Michelin-starred restaurant—the new owners wanted to expand F1's reach and moved to do so. Between 2007 and 2016, the private equity group added six new Grands Prix to the calendar, including spectacular and profitable nighttime events in Singapore (2008) and Abu Dhabi (2009), as well as a return to Mexico City, which drew huge interest thanks to home driver Sergio Perez. Additionally, to bump up revenues, CVC moved F1 to lucrative pay-to-view television deals from previous free-to-air agreements in multiple territories.

There were also stumbles. An attempt to list F1 on the stock exchange failed, and inaugural events in India, South Korea, and Russia generated less revenue than expected. The race in South Korea didn't even reach a fifth edition, and Russia was dropped after its invasion of Ukraine. Going behind television paywalls cost audience and advertisers, with global viewers dropping by a third from 2008 to stand at 400 million in 2015. There were internecine fights between teams over how revenues were divided, and smaller teams struggled to make ends meet.

Still, CVC easily made back its initial investment and then some by selling off various parts of the company and earning around $4.5 billion in the process. Having done so well, CVC concluded in 2016 that it had taken the sport as far as it could and that it was a good time to get out. Lacking confidence that Ecclestone

Driver Michael Schumacher and engineer Ross Brawn at the French Grand Prix, 1997.

was up to the job of managing the series, CVC began to seek suitable buyers. Many queued up, including Steve Ross, owner of the Miami Dolphins, and Ari Emanuel, CEO of William Morris Endeavor. But it was Liberty Media, run by billionaire John Malone, that intrigued CVC the most. With a market cap approaching $12 billion at the time and a portfolio that included the Atlanta Braves, Liberty had deep experience with cable. What's more, Liberty knew the American market, which CVC thought had room to grow, and was familiar with social media. In September 2016, an $8 billion deal was struck.

OVER THE MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS, LIBERTY learned a lot about the ins and outs of Formula 1, and it knew a change in outlook was needed. Ecclestone would later tell the *Mail on Sunday* that Liberty wanted "to get rid of the Bernie era: 'Let's get rid of Bernie's history,'" and in fact, Formula 1's new owners were quick to act on that idea. In addition to dumping Ecclestone, they moved out a number of his disciples and installed a three-strong management team, headed by Chase Carey, a former 21st Century Fox vice chairman who had helped launch Fox News and Fox Sports. At his side, Liberty placed Sean Bratches, ESPN's vice president of sales and marketing, who became manager of commercial operations; and the legendary engineer Ross Brawn, who was named Managing Director, Motor Sports.

The appointments spoke to the challenges facing Liberty. Carey's impressive work at News Corp. had prompted speculation that he could one day succeed Rupert Murdoch. Bratches, for his part, had built up a reputation at ESPN over three decades, handling advertising and sponsorship sales as well as content licensing. Yet unlike Ecclestone, who had known everything there was to know about F1 for almost its entire existence, neither Carey nor Bratches was familiar with the inner workings of the series.

Brawn was how Liberty decided to plug that gap. One of the most respected engineers and team owners in the sport's history, Brawn had been so central to the great Michael Schumacher's first two Drivers' Championships in the mid-1990s that Schumacher called upon the Briton to follow him to Ferrari, where they would form part of a dream team and go on to

dominate the scene from the turn of the millennium. Following that, Brawn saved a Honda Works team from oblivion and won a fairy-tale championship in 2009, with a team under his own name, sold the team to Mercedes, and retired from team duties after the 2013 season.

Brawn's expertise proved crucial in convincing old F1 hands to trust Liberty, and he had the respect needed to push the sport to improve, while Bratches was tasked with taking the story out to the wider world. Both had their work cut out for them. Awareness of F1 in the U.S. was—and remains—tiny in comparison to the major leagues of NFL, NBA, MLB and NHL, and Americans loyal to NASCAR and IndyCar needed a compelling reason to connect to races that often happened in unfavorable time zones on the other side of the globe.

To make inroads, Liberty leaned on what it knew from two of its existing holdings, the Braves, which the company had acquired in 2007, and the Formula E electric racing series, controlled by Malone's Liberty Global. For one thing, Liberty knew it was not CVC, in the Formula 1 game to sell off lucrative chunks of the business. Instead, the company would need to home in on the revenues F1 could generate through races and sponsorships—expanding where possible—and to venture outside of F1's wheelhouse with content creation.

Liberty's first stab at licensing beyond live race broadcasts proved crucial. The idea belonged to Bratches and it was called *Drive to Survive*. The concept was simple: reel in American fans with a behind-the-scenes docuseries that would focus on the outsized personalities who define F1. That included everyone from long-time F1 fixture Christian Horner, the team boss of Red Bull (and married to former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell), to young, telegenic drivers such as Charles Leclerc, Lando Norris, and Carlos Sainz. The series would play up the rivalries and off-the-track dramas and allow a new audience to connect with the sport.

The show debuted in March 2019 to muted enthusiasm in the U.S. About 288,000 viewers tuned in for the first season, a number that dropped to 230,000 for season 2. Then came the pandemic, bored people stuck at home, and skyrocketing viewership. By season 5, *Drive to Survive* was closing in on 650,000 viewers in the U.S., and drivers like Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen had become household names. The show, from a London-based production company that has since gone on to deliver sports docs on PGA golfers, elite tennis players, and surfing stars, won the Sports Emmy in May 2022 for Outstanding Documentary Series—Serialized and was nominated again in 2023.

Meanwhile, though the pandemic devastated Formula 1 in many ways—travel restrictions in 2020 halted the championship for four months, and races staged without fans caused income to plummet—it also gave Liberty an opening to discuss revenue distribution with the teams. Two important ways that F1 teams make money are through sponsorship deals and investments from car manufacturers who look at F1 as a marketing tool. For example, Mercedes's parent company, Daimler, will invest millions into the Mercedes team to help win the Constructors' Championship. Liberty, however, was concerned with a third revenue stream, provided by the series, which is awarded to teams based on how well they score each season. This is a traditional arrangement but one that tends to favor teams with bigger budgets. Before the pandemic, the company had tried to address the issue by introducing a cap, limiting the amount each team could spend developing and testing cars to $175 million. Yet the sum was still out of reach for some smaller teams.

THOUGH THE PANDEMIC DEVASTATED FORMULA 1 IN MANY WAYS, IT ALSO GAVE LIBERTY AN OPENING TO DISCUSS REVENUE WITH THE TEAMS.

During the pandemic, the fall in revenue impacted teams of all budgets, and Liberty was able to convince the principles to return to the negotiating table and effectively share the pain. In a collective agreement between Liberty, the teams, and FIA, Formula 1's governing body, the cap was lowered again to $145 million, a figure that would decrease by $5 million for each of the next two years. (There were some exclusions, such as driver salaries and marketing costs). The fact that Liberty, the teams, and FIA were signatories was important because it helped increase collaboration and helped empower Liberty to revamp F1's governance structure and make other important changes to the series.

Singer Megan Thee Stallion at the United States Grand Prix in Austin, 2021.

One significant first step was removing the F1 Strategy Group—a rule-setting organization that featured only six of the 10 teams—and including more stakeholders in decision-making. While the front-running teams were always going to be reluctant to give up advantages, Bratches's mantra was "a rising tide lifts all boats," and Liberty was able to sell the principals on the potential returns of a more competitive sport.

At the same time, Liberty hired more experienced engineers to help develop future technical regulations that would deliver better racing and put in motion plans to increase the number of races around the globe. Some moves courted controversy. For example, Ferrari fans were thrilled when Liberty brought back the iconic race at Imola, but the company also faced criticism for not protecting other historic venues in Europe that dropped off the calendar. And while new races in Saudi Arabia and Qatar brought in welcomed revenue, Liberty was attacked for dealing with such oppressive regimes.

The Grand Prix in Miami, by contrast was an instant, glitzy hit in 2022, and after some early grumbling, so was the Las Vegas Grand Prix, which debuted in 2023. In that race, Liberty took the unusual step of forgoing an external promoter and taking on those responsibilities itself. By cutting out the middleman, Liberty gained more control over the race and the potential to increase its earnings. Today, the U.S. is the only country to have three races on the calendar, with all events attracting A-list attendees such as Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes and socialite and model Kendall Jenner.

Now led by former Ferrari boss Stefano Domenicali, F1 is helped by the collaboration of its biggest star (Lewis Hamilton) and its most famous team (Ferrari), who in 2024 pulled off a move that rivals Babe Ruth's switch to the Yankees: Hamilton leaving Mercedes for the Prancing Horse. The partnership is a happy one from an ownership point of view, but alongside of the impending arrival of a new Cadillac F1 team from America in 2026, it provides another enticing story angle for Liberty to mine. ◻

Drive to Survive *helped boost F1's popularity and that of drivers like Daniel Ricciardo, below.*

The *Drive to Survive* Effect

Netflix's pandemic hit drew huge audiences and boosted F1's fortunes in the U.S.

BY AVA ERICKSON

In 2021, a global survey, commissioned by Motorsport Network in partnership with F1 and Nielsen Sports, revealed an interesting trend in the world of Formula 1. The average age of F1 fans had dropped to 32, four years younger than the 2017 average. The number of female participants had almost doubled, and there had been a sharp increase in fans who had been following F1 for five years or fewer. In his summary of the findings, James Allen, president of Motorsport Network, did not point to the F1 organization or the mediagenic Lewis Hamilton or some demographic blip for the changes. Instead, he mainly pointed to *Drive to Survive*, the Netflix docuseries that took viewers behind the scenes of an F1 season.

When *Drive to Survive* premiered in 2019, playing up team dynamics and personal dramas, it was an instant success around the world (though it took a few years for it to take off in the U.S.). Ratings grew during the pandemic and have continued to be strong since then. There have been six additional seasons, with the most recent, season 7, attracting 2.6 million viewers in the first week (a drop from S6's 2.9 million, but the show has been renewed for season 8). "[*Drive to Survive*] does an incredible job turning the natural drama of a racing season into a narrative that can encourage a fan to tune into the real thing," writes Elizabeth Blackstock on automotive news site Jalopnik.

The show has not only made

stars of previously unknown drivers like Daniel Ricciardo, from Australia, and executives like Christian Horner, the CEO of Red Bull Racing, it has helped F1 crack the U.S. market. In 2022, U.S. viewership per F1 race on ESPN exceeded 1 million for the first time; viewership has hovered around that figure since then. The show is also credited with helping pave the way for the new Grand Prix races in Miami and Las Vegas, boosting ticket sales, and bringing in more sponsors.

3

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Charismatic, competitive, and without fear, early Formula 1 stars like Jim Clark and Stirling Moss paved the way for generations of drivers.

PETRONAS

FROM THE ARCHIVES: JULY 9, 1965

HERO WITH A HOT SHOE

Jim Clark began as a shy Scottish sheep farmer, but evolved into one of F1's greatest stars. His death in 1968 shocked the racing world.

"MOTEURS!"

The command rang out at 3 p.m., and for one long moment last week, all the klaxons of hell seemed concentrated at Clermont-Ferrand in the Auvergne Mountains of France. Electric starters whined. Engines coughed, belched smoke, and shrieked defiance at the wind. Gears crashed, tires squealed, and to a roar from 50,000 spectators, 17 Formula 1 racing cars hurtled off the starting grid for lap 1 of the French Grand Prix—the oldest auto race in the world.

Gradually, as the howling machines disappeared into the hills, a hypnotic hush came over Clermont-Ferrand. All eyes were riveted on a spot 400 feet below, where the asphalt track curled like a thin, black snake between two green hills. The noise came first: the rising nasal whine of a V-8 engine echoing off the hills; the gastric grunts as its driver worked down through the gears.

Who was it? The car was green. No. 6. Driver wearing a blue helmet. Who else? "Clark!" somebody shouted, and suddenly the crowd was chanting: "Clark! Clark! Clark!" Sure enough, just 3 minutes and 29 seconds after it had left the starting grid, Jim Clark's Lotus-Climax swept around the last lefthand bend into full view of the cheering stands. "C'est formidable!" gasped one awed Frenchman. Sighed another: "C'est termine"—It's all over.

Jim Clark in his iconic Lotus, at the Snetterton Circuit in Norfolk, England, 1964.

In 1966, Clark considered leaving Lotus but stayed; in 1968, he won his 25th Grand Prix.

And so it was. After just one lap, Clark was already 100 yards ahead of his nearest pursuer. But for 39 more laps, he coolly, relentlessly poured it on until he had smashed the official lap record (82.39 m.p.h.) three times in succession and 15 times in all—eventually raising it to a fantastic 90.59 m.p.h. He did it on a course that he had never even seen until two days before the race, a course that ranks as one of the toughest in the world: 51 curves and 102 gear changes per 5-mile lap, an average of one gear change every 2 seconds. When he finally coasted under the checkered flag, he was far enough ahead that the only thing he could see in his rearview mirror was his own face.

ANY RACE, ANYWHERE.

The victory was worth $1,820—a pittance compared to the $168,500 Clark won at Indianapolis on May 31. It was also worth nine points toward his second Grand Prix championship and boosted his 1965 total so far to 27—10 more than his closest competitor. And it proved, for the nth time, that James Clark, O.B.F., of Edington Mains, Chirnside, Berwickshire, Scotland, is the world's quickest man on wheels. It was only nine years ago that Clark drove in his first auto race, only five years ago that he sat behind the wheel of a Grand Prix car for the first time in his life. Today, at 29, he is the man to beat in any kind of race, in any kind of car, on any kind of track, anywhere.

Clark has raced and won in rear-engined cars, front-engined cars, sports cars, grand-touring cars, saloons, and Formula Juniors; on asphalt in South Africa, on dirt in Australia, on concrete in England. In 1963, Clark became the youngest Grand Prix champion in the history of motor racing, set another record by winning seven out of the 10 events that counted toward the title. In five short, incredible years, Clark has won 16 world championship Grand Prix races—more than Britain's fabled Stirling Moss, who spent eight years winning 14, and as many as Argentina's five-time World Champion Juan Manuel Fangio, who had 16 when he quit racing at the age of 47. Says Moss: "In terms of sheer native ability, Jim probably has more than any champion in history." Lotus Designer Colin Chapman puts it even

BORN 1939

Jackie Stewart

The three-time Formula 1 world champ became one of the sport's most vocal safety advocates.

BY AVA ERICKSON

Nicknamed "the Flying Scot" for his speed and grace on the racetrack, Scottish-born Sir John "Jackie" Stewart grew up around cars but took a while to embrace the sport. His father, an amateur motorcycle racer, owned a garage and dealerships for Austins and Jaguars, while his brother, Jimmy, raced competitively. After dropping out of school at 15 (he was diagnosed with dyslexia later in life), Stewart took up skeet shooting and even competed for a place on the 1960 British Olympic Team. In the meantime, he honed his skills caring for cars in his father's shop and managed to buy his first car before he was old enough to drive it. He was 21 when he was recruited to race, and because his mother was terrified of the track, he entered under the pseudonym A.N. Other.

Spotted by Ken Tyrrell, the team manager of the Tyrrell Racing Organization, Stewart was offered and accepted a job on the squad in 1963 and went on to win seven races in a row. Soon he was working his way up in the motor-racing world. He spent three seasons at the BRM Formula 1 team, winning two Grands Prix, then again partnered up with Tyrrell, who had pivoted to F1. In the following six seasons, Stewart was F1's driver to beat. He finished his career with three world championships, 27 race wins, and 43 podium finishes (the records at the time of his retirement).

But Stewart's legacy goes far beyond his trophies. In 1966, during the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa-Francorchamps, Stewart ran off the track driving 165 m.p.h. in heavy rain and crashed into a telephone pole. The cockpit filled with fuel from the ruptured gas tank, and Stewart, trapped inside, escaped with the help of two other drivers who had also crashed. Stewart was taken to the hospital in a decrepit ambulance, which got lost on the way, and though his injuries weren't serious, the experience underscored for him just how dangerous the sport could be. At one point in the 1970s, for a driver who raced for five years, the chances being killed were fifty-fifty.

In the wake of the crash, Stewart became one of motorsports' most vocal champions for safety measures. He helped introduce full-face helmets and seat belts for drivers, as well as safety barriers and larger runoff areas around the tracks, especially on dangerous corners. He also aided in the creation of a Grand Prix medical unit that traveled to the races. He became one of the first celebrities of F1, appearing in commercials and as a broadcaster. Today, Stewart is involved in a number of charitable organizations, including Dyslexia Scotland and Race Against Dementia.

more emphatically: "Jim Clark is the greatest racing driver the world has ever seen."

That covers an awful lot of drivers and an awful lot of races. Auto racing is as old as the second automobile. The first organized race was exactly 71 years ago, in 1894, and it was won by a bowler-hatted French nobleman named Count de Dion, who drove his steamer from Paris to Rouen, a distance of 79 miles, at an average speed of 12.6 m.p.h. Daredevil de Dion could not possibly have guessed the contagion he was spreading. Other races followed quickly, all the way across the Continent to Vienna. The British were a little late joining the fun: In the early days, by law, British motorists had to be preceded by men on foot crying their approach. But by 1903, on the Continent, 3 million fans were turning out to watch a road race from Paris to Madrid. In the U.S. a year later, a Dearborn, Mich., farmer's son was advertising his Ford as "the fastest car in the world"—and proving it by clocking 91.37 m.p.h. on the ice of Lake St. Clair. It was not long before the U.S. public was thrilling to the exploits of a new set of heroes—Barney Oldfield, Ralph De Palma, and a mysterious Baron von Rickenbacher, who later changed the spelling of his last name, became the U.S. ace of aces by shooting down 22 German planes in World War I, and is still known around the world as Eddie Rickenbacker.

A MATTER OF PRIDE

The pursuit of glorious speed has never ceased; the sport has never slowed. Engines swelled in size from one to two, to four, six, eight, even to 12 cylinders, and speeds soared. In 1924, California's Peter DePaolo "cracked a ton"—averaging 101.13 m.p.h. at the Indianapolis 500—and Europe's Ettore Bugatti explained why he equipped his costly cars with fantastically worthless brakes: "Automobiles are meant to go, not to stop."

Racing supremacy became a matter of national pride. First the French, then the Italians dominated the Grand Prix circuit. In the late '30s, the megalomania of Hitler gave the world the most awesome racing cars it has ever known: the Mercedes and Auto Unions. They were great, growling 600-h.p. monsters that could hit 200 m.p.h. on a straight. Two world wars did their share to help, producing generations of youngsters thirsty for thrills.

Today, auto racing is the third biggest spectator sport in the U.S. (after basketball and horse racing). In 1964, according to the National Hot Rod Association, 284,043 Americans competed in 1,904 drag-racing events, and they were watched by another 3,312,542 Americans. Illinois's Meadowdale Raceway, which attracted 50,000 paying customers in all of 1962, almost equaled that in one weekend last year; and California's Riverside Raceway, site of the Grand Prix for Sports Cars, reports that attendance this year is running 14% ahead of 1964 (200,500), and that 1964 was 21% over 1963.

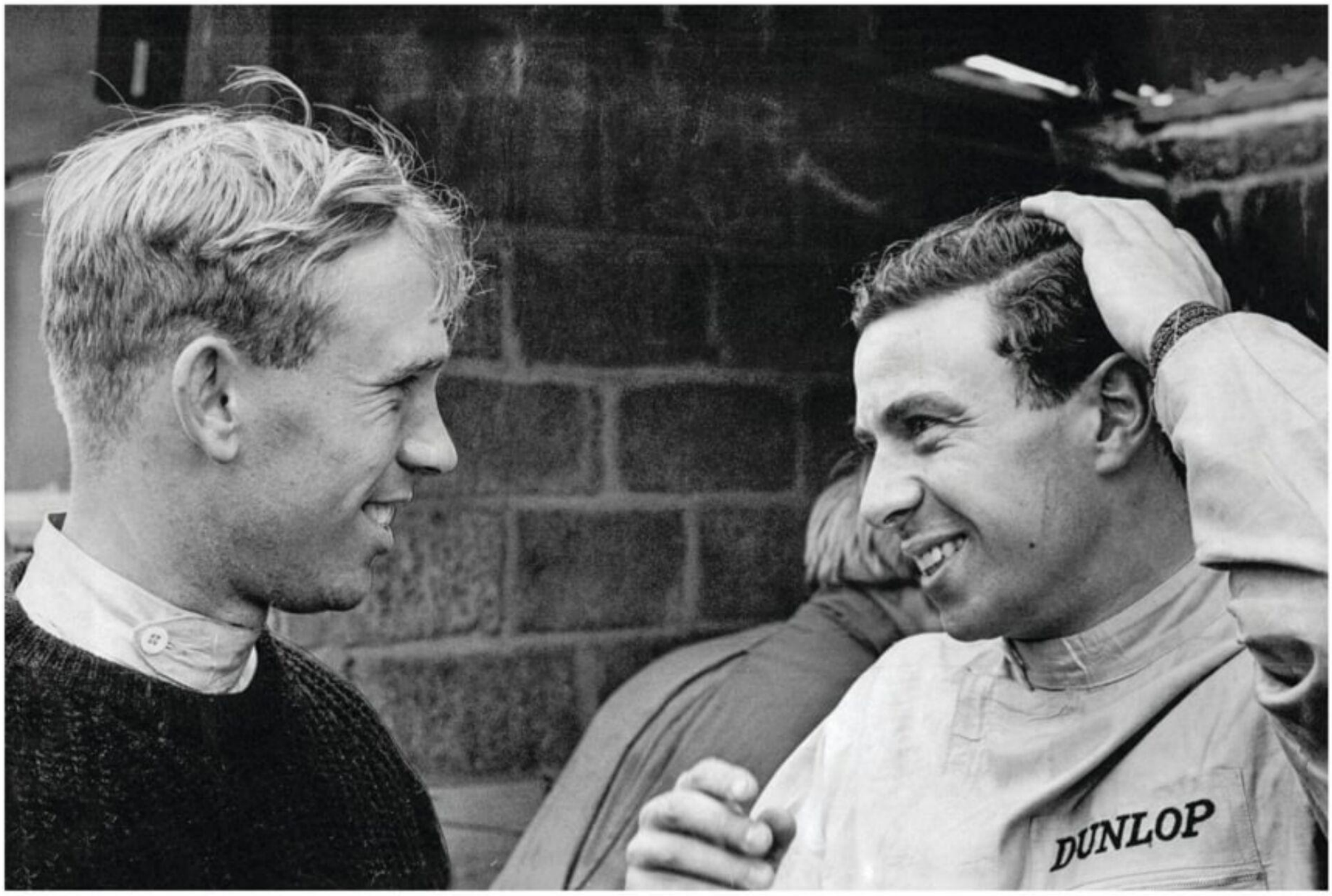
ETTORE BUGATTI SAID HE EQUIPPED HIS COSTLY CARS WITH WORTHLESS BRAKES BECAUSE "AUTOMOBILES ARE MEANT TO GO, NOT TO STOP."

The biggest one-day sports attraction in the U.S. is the Indianapolis 500. Estimated attendance last May 31: anywhere from 250,000 to 300,000. By some countries' standards, that's a fair-to-middling crowd. Germany's top sports-car race, the 1,000 kilometers of Nürburgring, regularly attracts more than 300,000 fans, and smaller weekly events draw up to 50,000. Japan staged its first-ever "grand prix" in 1963. Promoters were stunned when no fewer than 360 would-be Jimmy Clarks signed up to compete and 300,000 enthusiastic spectators turned out to cheer them on.

CHORES AND CONCENTRATION

The racing fan is more than a single spectator: He considers himself an active competitor in the world's biggest participant sport. Nearly everyone who drives a car thinks about beating the "hot shoe" in the next lane. Auto companies do their best to enhance the illusion: naming cars "Le Mans," "Monza," "G.T.O.," "Grand Prix"; equipping them with bucket seats, tachometers, four-speed transmissions, and speedometers thoughtfully calibrated up to 160 m.p.h.—85 m.p.h. above the highest legal speed limit in the U.S.

If a car addict is really serious about racing, he can enter one of the 9,000 stock-car or 2,000 sports-car races held in the U.S. each year. For $1,000, he can even take a one-week course in competition driving from Racer-Designer Carroll Shelby. For the really successful racing driver, the rewards are great.



Clark with driver Jim Spence at a Grand Prix practice in Brands Hatch track in West Kingsdown, England.

Fred Lorenzen has already won $63,675 on the stock-car circuit this year, and A. J. Foyt won $250,000 in 1964. Another field is that led by Art Arfons, who hit 600 m.p.h. in his jet-powered Green Monster at Bonneville last October and now has his sights set on breaking the sound barrier—on land. Arfons has his hero too—Jimmy Clark—and at the Indianapolis 500, he was right there, one of the first in the line of well-wishers waiting to greet Clark after his victory.

"WEE BIT SLIPPERY"

Handsome, hazel-eyed Jimmy Clark is the perfect pro driver. At 5 feet 7¾ inches and 150 lbs., he is even the perfect size: small enough to squeeze into the 2-foot.-wide cockpit of a 1,000-lb. Formula 1 car, big enough to see over its bonnet. He has the hands and arms of a jockey; his eyesight is phenomenal. His reflexes are so fast that he could probably pluck a fly out of midair. Clark's business adviser, John Stephenson, remembers a midwinter ride in a sedan with Jim. "The road was wet and frosty," says Stephenson. "Suddenly we were going into a tight downhill lefthander. I figured it as a 70-m.p.h. corner—but there we were doing 90. The tail started to go, and I thought, this is a shunt for sure. Then Jim made a tiny correction with the steering wheel, and we were through the corner. All he said was, 'Wee bit slippery back there.'"

ON THE SLY

Jim Clark has been "inner-directed" ever since he was 9 and studied every move his father made as he drove the family Austin Seven around the fields of Edington Mains, the Clarks' 1,200-acre Berwickshire farm. One evening Mama Clark glanced out the window to find the Austin rolling merrily across a field—apparently with nobody at the wheel. "Jim was told he must never do that again," says Mrs. Clark. "But you can't watch an active boy all the time, can you?" Shipped off to private school, Jim learned all about rugby, cricket, field hockey, golf—and not much else. So he quit at 16 and went home. "Normally there were two shepherds on the farm," he recalls, "but one of them had left just. My father bought me a dog and a stick and said, 'Right. Now get on with it.'"

1949–2019

Niki Lauda

The Austrian champion recovered from a near-fatal accident through sheer force of will.

BY AVA ERICKSON

Oddly enough, Niki Lauda's fascination with racing started with his family's paper-manufacturing business. Growing up in Austria, the future F1 star got the driving bug learning to operate forklifts and working paper-delivery routes, and after seeing a German Grand Prix at age 17, he set his heart on entering a race. He secretly traded his Mini Cooper (because his grandfather wanted him in the family business) for a race-ready version owned by a local driver and began to practice. Lauda made his racing debut in 1968 in a local hill climb, a traditional motorsport, in which drivers compete against the clock on an uphill course. The 19-year-old finished second and began entering various competitions, including Formula Vee, 2, and 3, financing his passion with bank loans. Lauda saw some success, but his breakout year was 1975, when he drove a Ferrari 312T during the Formula 1 season, won five races, and became the World Champion.

Lauda was poised to have an even better season in 1976, when he won five out of nine races and accumulated more than twice as many points in the championship standings as the closest competitor. The tenth race was the German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring track, considered one of the world's most dangerous races because of steep elevation changes, blind corners, and sharp crests in the course. Concerned about safety, Lauda tried to get the drivers to boycott the race, but to no avail. During the second lap, the champ lost control of his car and crashed into an embankment. His car burst into flames and he had to be pulled from the wreckage. While in a coma, Lauda was administered last rites by a priest but ultimately pulled through. On September 12, 1976, just six weeks after his crash, Lauda returned to the track with bandages on his head and wrists. He was edged out of the world championship that year by James Hunt, partly because he declined to compete in the final race in Japan due to unsafe weather conditions. He went on to win the championship in 1977 with Ferrari, and the 1984 title with McLaren.

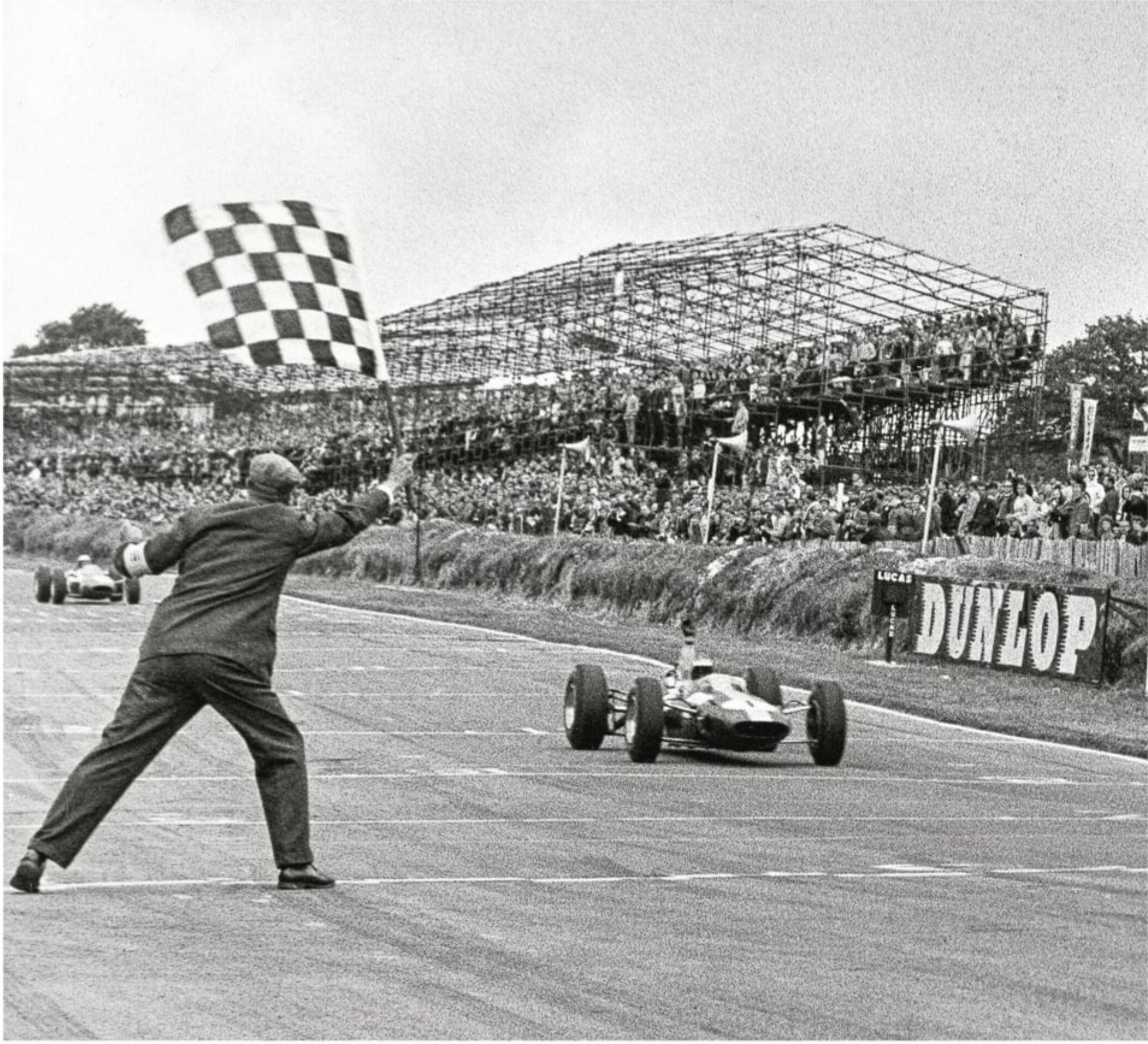
Jimmy was running Edington Mains himself by the time he was 18. He had his own car, a vintage Sunbeam-Talbot, and he began competing in local rallies. "Father said it was a waste of time—and he wanted to know why my car cost five times as much to keep up as his did." He kept on rallying, mostly on the sly. One night, while driving his mother to a sister's house to babysit, he worked up the courage to spring his big surprise. "I'm going to start motor racing," he said. "Oh no you're not," said Mrs. Clark. Thereupon, Jim kicked the throttle, gave the steering wheel a flick, and sent the car hurtling through a curve at 70 m.p.h. in a perfectly controlled drift. His mother said nothing more.

In 1958, Clark joined the Border Reivers, a Scottish auto-racing club; curiously, his most important contest that year was one he lost. On Boxing Day, December 26, Clark was driving the Reivers' Lotus Elite in a 10-lap race at Brands Hatch when he found himself involved in "a whale of a dice" with another Elite driven by a fellow who looked like actor David Niven. The competitor, it turned out, was Colin Chapman—a young engineer who had graduated from London University in 1948 and set up shop in 1952 as Lotus Cars, Ltd. For eight of the 10 laps, Jim managed to stay in front. Then an Austin-Healey Sprite grazed his Lotus on a corner. Jim had all he could do to avoid plowing head-on into an embankment, and in the confusion Chapman nipped past to win. "Oh dear, nasty," sighs Clark. "Anyhow, that was how I got to know Colin Chapman."

THE FULL 10%

It was the start of a lasting friendship. "The formula for a champion race driver," says Chapman, "is 10% natural ability, 90% experience and dedication." His own dice with Clark at Brands Hatch had convinced him that Jim "had the 10% in full." Already hard at work on a revolutionary Grand Prix-car design—a "monocoque" body shell that needed no tubular skeleton—Chapman decided that Clark was just the man to drive it. If he could get him.

Clark, here ahead of Graham Hill and Dan Gurney, won the 1964 Dutch Grand Prix at Zandvoort.



Clark had already contracted to drive a Grand Prix car for Aston Martin, but Aston Martin never got around to building it. So for most of two years, Clark putted around in Formula Juniors and sports cars, until finally, in the middle of the 1960 season, Aston Martin gave him a break and loaned him to Lotus in time for the Dutch Grand Prix.

Some break. Chapman's new monocoque Lotuses had proved to be a sensation all right. Stirling Moss had crashed in one and nearly been killed; Mike Taylor had crashed in one and nearly been killed; Alan Stacey had crashed in one and been killed. "I wouldn't drive a car like that," said the U.S.'s Phil Hill. "You never know what piece is going to break off next." In the Dutch Grand Prix, Clark's gearbox broke; in the British Grand Prix, it was his suspension.

EXACTLY 135 AND SIX

By the time Clark signed with Lotus in 1961, he had become a pretty good sidewalk mechanic, thanks to all of the car's woes. At the same time, he was polishing his driving skills to the point where he could say: "When I go into a corner, I can tell you instantly whether I'm inches too far out or in from where I want to be. If I plan to head in at 135 m.p.h. and leave six inches, that's it—exactly 135 and six."

Nothing, though, could have prepared him for what happened at Monza midway through the 1961 season. Wolfgang von Trips's Ferrari swerved suddenly, with Jimmy's Lotus directly behind. For one horrible instant, the two cars touched at 150 m.p.h. The Ferrari hurtled up an embankment, ricocheted off a steel guardrail, sheared through a wire fence, and spun end over end. Clark leaped out of his crumpled

Clark winning the British Grand Prix at Brands Hatch in 1964.

Lotus and pushed Trips's car off the road. There was nothing he could do for Trips—or for 17 spectators who had been leaning on the fence. "When a thing like that happens," says Jim, "you vow that you will never drive in a race again. But then your mind begins to function, and everyday things begin to crowd their way back. Three days later, you are packing your bags for another race."

In 1962 it looked like the same story all over again. Jimmy was leading the Dutch Grand Prix when he lost three of his five gears. At Monaco he was running second when his engine blew up. Before the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa, mechanics worked all night to install a new engine and gearbox in Clark's Lotus. The next day Jimmy worked his way into the lead on the first lap—and ran away with the race for his first Grand Prix victory. Before the year was out, he had won two more, and heard himself hailed as "the new Stirling Moss."

OIL AND GRAPES

After that, it suddenly got easier to count Clark's losses than his victories. In 1963, he lost Monaco and came in second in the German Grand Prix, third in the U.S. But he won in the Netherlands, France, and Belgium. All told, Jim won seven Grands Prix, equalling Alberto Ascari's 13-year-old record. He would have won the Indianapolis 500 besides, if officials had followed their own rules and black-flagged Parnelli Jones, whose Offenhauser was leaking oil all over the track.

Jim got untracked in 1964—at Indianapolis as well as on the Grand Prix circuit. Last year's Indy 500 was the bloodiest in years, with two drivers dead, five injured in a fiery crash on the second lap. Clark missed that by being ahead of the pack. But speed did him no good when the tread peeled off a tire at 150 m.p.h. and the left rear wheel of his Lotus collapsed. Old Indy hands had to admire the way the "sporty-car" driver from Scotland held his bucking car steady and braked it to a stop on the infield grass. The same evil luck dogged Clark in Europe all summer: He won three out of his first five Grands Prix before all sorts of little things started going wrong. In France it was a hole in a piston, in Germany a broken valve. Clark did not win another race.

This year it's different. In his smashing victory at Indianapolis, he led for all but 10 of the 200 laps, became the first foreigner to win the Indy 500 since Dario Resta in 1916. There was nothing remotely close, either, about South Africa. Wearing a corset to ease the pain from a slipped disk in his back, he became the first man ever to top 100 m.p.h. on East London's tricky, twisting track. At Spa last month, thunderstorms made the trip a little dicey, but Clark still scored his fourth straight victory.

LITTLE COMPENSATIONS

The trouble with being a hero is living up to it, which for Clark means living on a dead trot. After his triumphant win at Clermont-Ferrand last week, Jim flew directly to London and spent most of a day processing requests for autographed photographs from U.S. fans. Then it was off to Reims for a business appointment, back to England for a day of test driving at Silverstone, and back to Reims again—this time to practice for a July 4 Formula 2 race. Ahead on the schedule: a Ford junket to Switzerland, a race in

The Jim Clark Museum, in Berwickshire, Scotland, opened after he died in a racing accident in 1968.

Britain, a trip to Rouen, a movie filming in Scotland, and the Dutch Grand Prix. This frantic life has its little compensations. Fortune, for one: His income from racing this year will top $230,000, and Edington Mains is busily in the black too, producing barley for Scotch-whisky distillers, sheep for wool, and cattle for slaughter. He has his Scottish sheep dog, Sweep, who pines for him while he is away—and his flaxen-haired girlfriend, Sally Stokes, who travels with him and tends a stopwatch in the pits.

Finally, there is fame. Jim Clark is already the most famous Scot since Robert Burns. Pretty girls strain against police barricades pleading for his attention; small boys dog his footsteps, clutching at his clothes. (At Indianapolis last year, the crowds were so insistent that Jim nervously warned a strolling companion: "Look, when we get to the paddock I've got to take off. If I walk, I'm in real trouble.") The Queen of England invites Jim to garden parties. His fan mail runs to 100 or more letters a week: propositions from businessmen that he tears up angrily ("I don't want to be bandied about like some blooming soap powder"), laboriously printed missives on lined paper that start out: "Mummy asked me yesterday what I want to be when I grow up, and I told her. You should have heard what mummy said." A day's mail may even bring a poem penned by a Scottish mill worker:

A proven champion of the world,
O'er tricky tracks you've screeched and skirled.
And mony a braw held you've uncurled
Wi' fear and fright,
As roond the hairpin bends you whirled,
Like Hell gane gyte.

Jim Clark still bites his nails ("It's better than smoking," he insists defensively). He still is shy: "If you're a Scot, you don't push yourself forward. That's the way I was brought up." He can't quite get it through his head that he is a celebrity. "That bloke over there," he asks, "why is he staring at me?" And his idea of a great old swinging time is to tug on his black mesh driving gloves, climb into his little Lotus Elan, and go blasting through the countryside at 100 m.p.h.—eyes on the road, hands in the prescribed "10 minutes to 2" position—until he gets exhausted and turns back for home. "Actually," says Jim Clark, "the only time I'm relaxed is when I'm behind the wheel." □

BORN 1953

Nigel Mansell

Nicknamed “Our Nige” by his fans, Mansell was the second most successful British F1 driver of all time, behind Lewis Hamilton.

BY AVA ERICKSON

As a driver, he was abrasive, demanding, theatrical, and one of the best—and most polarizing—of his era. Yet Nigel Mansell, who competed in Formula 1 throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, was above all, a hero to many for his win-or-bust approach (total: 31 wins, 32 crashes). Working-class British fans claimed the swashbuckling Mansell as one of their own, dubbing him Our Nige; he was also known as Red 5 because his car number was painted red to distinguish his vehicle from his teammates’; and il Leone (the lion), the name bestowed on him by Italian fans during his years at Ferrari.

Growing up in a small town near Birmingham, England, Mansell got the driving bug long before puberty. He frequented the track with his dad, and at age 7 drove a car for the first time; by 10, Mansell had his own kart, powered by a lawn mower engine. He won his first kart race at 14, which led to serious motor racing with Formula Ford and Formula 3.

Mansell’s career was plagued by crashes and injuries from the start. In the middle of his second Formula Ford season, he broke his neck during a testing accident and was advised by doctors to stay in bed for six months, as he had come perilously close to quadriplegia. Instead, Mansell snuck out of the hospital (telling the nurses he was going to the toilet) and raced on, becoming the 1977 British Formula Ford Champion. In 1979, when he was at Formula 3, he crashed and broke his back, but again returned to the track. In 1980, the year of his F1 debut with Lotus, Mansell was seriously burned by a fuel leak in the cockpit during the Austrian Grand Prix.

Mansell seemed to thrive on adversity and rivalries, most famously with Brazilian star Ayrton Senna. One of their most heated exchanges came in 1987, during the Belgian Grand Prix, after the two drivers collided and spun off the track. A furious Mansell pursued Senna on the sidelines, where he grabbed Senna by the overalls, pulled the zipper up to Senna’s chin, and threatened him. Senna, for his part, seemed relaxed about the incident and was quoted in the biography *The Life of Senna*, by Tom Rubython, as saying: “When a man holds you round the throat, I do not think that he has come to apologise.”

Mansell also competed in IndyCar, another open-wheel race series. In 1993, he became the only driver to simultaneously hold both the World Drivers’ Championship for F1 and the American open-wheel National Championship for IndyCar. Today, Mansell is the president of UK Youth, a charity organization that does community programming to help empower young people and equip them for every stage of their lives.

Stirling Moss, here with the Aintree 200 trophy in 1960. He was known as the greatest driver never to win the World Championship.

FROM THE ARCHIVES: MAY 4, 1962

SYNONYMOUS WITH SPEED

In 1962, TIME was on hand when Britian's Stirling Moss, as brash as he was fast, crashed at the Goodwood International Grand Prix.

IT'S NO THRILL BLASTING DOWN THE straightaway at 180 m.p.h. What's really thrilling is taking a 70-m.p.h. corner at 75—coming through it at the absolute limit of tire adhesion, with the nose pointed perfectly down the straightaway and the throttle flat on the floor. Then you feel like an artist who has spent his life trying to paint the smile of Mona Lisa, finally gets it right with a single flick of his brush, and says to the rest of the world, "There, you bastards, match that!"

There are not many who can even come close to Britain's Stirling Moss as a racing driver. Pint-sized and profane, he is on his way to becoming a legend in his own lifetime—fawned over by royalty, idolized by fans the world over. At 32, he has won more races (194) than any man alive, and more world championship Grand Prix races (14) than any driver in history save Argentina's Juan Fangio, who had 16 when he quit at 47. Moss has never won the official Grand Prix championship. But last year he won 23 of the 48 races he entered, and his fellow drivers concede that Moss sets the standard by which they judge their own skills. Says the U.S.'s Phil Hill, who won the 1961 Grand Prix championship racing for Ferrari: "I'm the champion, but all anyone talks about is Moss." Moss's fan mail runs to 10,000 letters a year and his income to something like $150,000. He drives as if every race were his last. He has pressed wildly on with hot oil spraying in his face, raced with his leg in a plaster cast, sped around curves while nearly blinded by glass fragments in his eyes. He cannot even remember how many crashes he has survived. "Most of them were incidents, not accidents," Moss says. "Twice my steering wheel snapped off. Nine or 10 times the brakes failed. Ten or 11 times wheels fell off. I don't know how many times I got crunched by another car, or tires blew, or things broke. Death is something that frightens me, and thinking about it isn't going to make it less likely to happen. I wouldn't drive a racing car unless there was an element of danger involved. Does a bullfighter want to fight a bull without horns?"

WARM SEATS AND MELTED SILVER

In Chichester last week for the 100-mile Goodwood International Grand Prix, Moss played himself to the hilt. Supercharged and sassy, he played croquet, guzzled fruit juice at a cocktail party thrown by the Duke of Richmond and Gordon (whom he irreverently called "Your Gryce" in a broad Cockney accent), and stayed up twisting at a country dance hall until 2 a.m. On race morning, while other drivers, taut and nervous, brooded over seltzer and coffee, he happily downed a huge breakfast, described the novel furnishings he was planning for his bachelor digs in London: a heated toilet seat and a 300-lb. silver coffee table made from melted-down trophy cups ("What else can you do with silver? Fill teeth?").

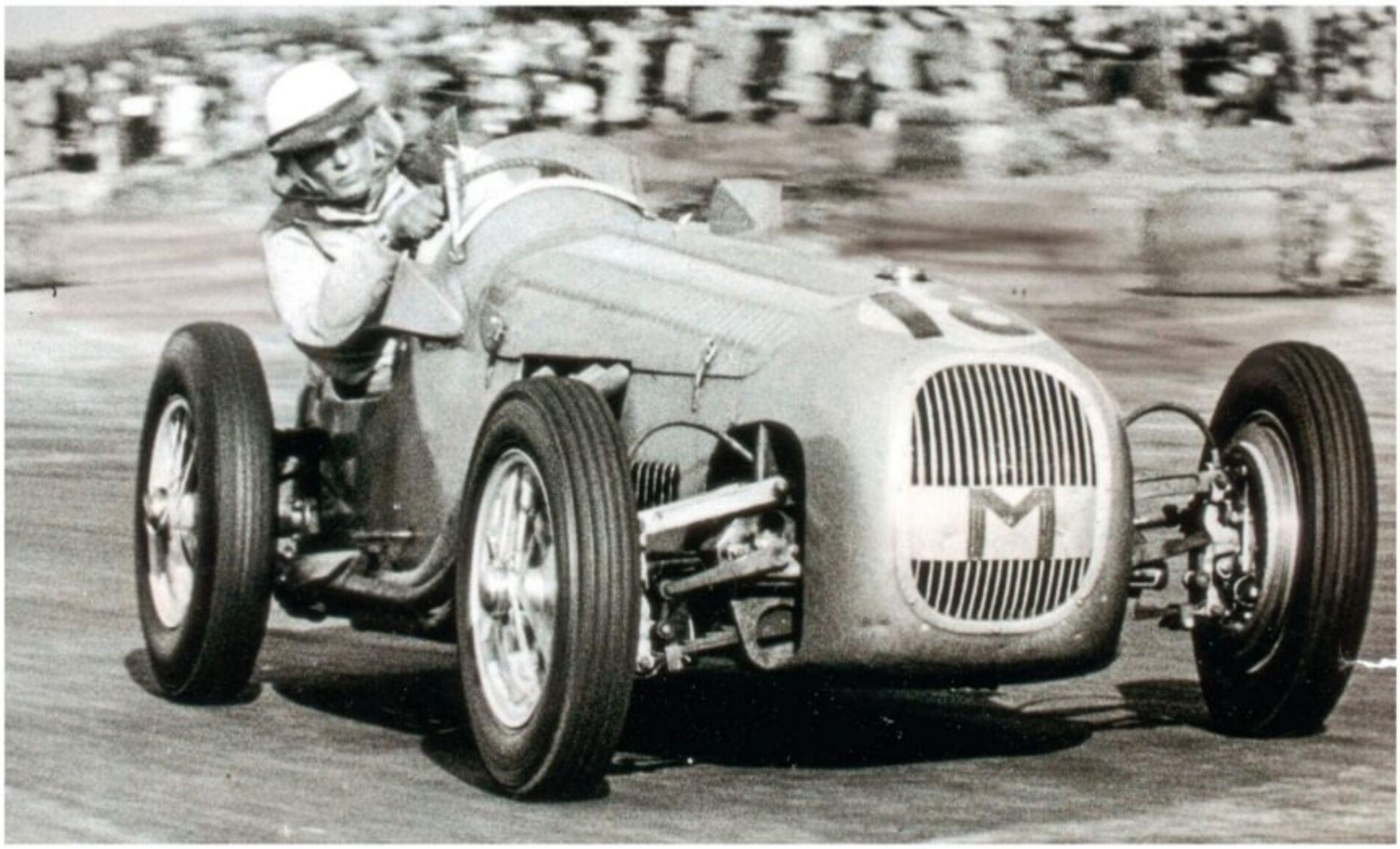
Moss had hoped for rain ("I do better in the wet"), but a bright sun warmed the crowd of 72,000. Settling into the cockpit of his low-slung, pale green Lotus, Moss joshed rival Graham Hill, who was piloting a faster BRM: "Don't try too hard, Graham, or you'll blow it up." He screwed in his earplugs, snapped his helmet strap, and adjusted his goggles. "Hey," he yelled to mechanic Tony Robinson. "Where's my chewing gum?" Robinson handed him a stick. Moss waved. "Here goes," he said. Then, exhaust crackling, he roared off to the starting line.

17TH AND LAST

The race was only eight laps old when Moss, brakes squealing, pulled into the pits. His throttle linkage was fouled; his gearbox was jammed tightly in fourth. By the time the pit crew had repaired the car, Moss's position was hopeless: He was 17th and last, more than three laps behind the leader, Hill. "What are you going to do?" asked a friend. Said Moss, with a wicked grin: "Have a bloody go."

The next 27 laps were what the crowd had come to see. Around and around the 2½-mile Goodwood circuit, with its six corners and dangerous S-shaped chicane, he drove with awesome speed. Relentlessly, he closed the gap on Hill: From 17th, he moved up to 15th, then 13th, 11th and 9th. He saluted as he passed other cars and waved to mechanic Robinson in the pits. "Stirling is driving incredibly," reported the track announcer from his vantage point in a tower. "He's taking the corners faster than ever before." In a Lola,

Moss, below in 1950. At the height of his fame, polls in Britain showed him as popular as the Queen. Opposite, top: The Monaco Grand Prix, 1956; bottom: Holding the steering wheel from his crash at Goodwood in 1962. He died in 2020 at age 90.



Britain's John Surtees sped to a new lap record of 1 minute 23.6 seconds. Moss cut it to 1 minute 23.4 seconds, then to 1 minute 23 seconds, then 1 minute 22.6 seconds, then 1 minute 22.4 seconds—each split second pushing him closer to the limit of adhesion. In Moss's tension-filled pit, dockers exchanged glances. Murmured a mechanic, "He's pushing it."

PAST THE LIMIT

On the 34th lap, Moss clipped his time to 1 minute 22.2 seconds, flashing around the narrow, twisting course at a fantastic average speed of 105 m.p.h. On the 35th, as he approached St. Mary's Corner—a difficult right-and-left jog in the road—the limit was passed. Said Moss, before the race: "With luck, you can take St. Mary's at 90 m.p.h." Recalled Graham Hill, afterward: "As we went into St. Mary's, Stirling was coming up on me at about 110 m.p.h. on the outside. In the mirror I saw him coming up fast, and then he just kept going straight." Moss's Lotus hurtled across 150 yards of grass, plowed head on into an 8-foot-high embankment, spun backward about 10 yards, and stopped dead, a crumpled, almost unrecognizable ruin.

Rescuers found Moss slumped unconscious in the cockpit—his goggles shattered, his blue, flameproof coveralls shredded, his helmet cracked, his face masked with blood. Moss's lips, gums, and nose were split, and his right cheek was torn open to the bone. With metal shears and hacksaws, mechanics worked for 30 minutes before they could free the racer from his aluminum cocoon: The twisted steering wheel was jammed tightly in his ribs; the car's body shell clamped his legs and thighs; the gas tank (up front in the rear-engined Lotus) was pushed back almost into his lap.

Moss's father, Alfred, arrived at the gas-reeking wreck. "Please don't let it burn," he pleaded softly, and someone lifted the car's live battery from between Moss's calves. To his unconscious son, he kept repeating: "You'll be all right, boy. Don't you worry, now. We'll get you out of here." Patient vigil. At Chichester's Royal West Sussex Hospital, doctors sewed up Moss's face with 40 stitches. Incredibly, his blood pressure and pulse were perfectly normal. X-rays showed surprisingly little damage—two broken ribs, a cracked knee, a torn shoulder. But Moss was in a deep coma. Transferred to a neurological hospital in London, he was examined by brain surgeons, who found no indication of skull fracture or severe brain hemorrhage, though he remained unconscious.

From Nairobi, where she had just placed third in last week's tortuous, 3,080-mile East African Rally, Moss's sister, Pat, hurried back to join the vigil at his bedside. By week's end, Stirling was awake, responding to commands, speaking briefly to relatives and friends. Doctors said he would probably recover completely, could perhaps race within six weeks. His father, a onetime racer himself, could only say, "This is what I've been afraid of. You can't go on having accidents like this. But you can't tell a man of 32 to give up his life's work just like that." □

LEGEND AND MAVERICK

Michael Schumacher, a seven-time world champ, was one of the sport's best, and most ruthless, drivers.

BY EILEEN DASPIN

IT WAS THE LAST LAP OF THE 2005 MONACO Grand Prix, and German siblings Ralf Schumacher, driving for Toyota, and Michael Schumacher, driving for Ferrari, were in the sixth and seventh positions, respectively. As the two raced toward the checkered flag, Michael, determined to overtake his younger brother, veered sharply, squeezing in between the wall and Ralf's Toyota. The move could have killed either of the brothers, and after the race, a furious Ralf ripped into Michael. "It seems to me that Michael sometimes loses it," he told a reporter. "I have the feeling he sometimes switches his brain off." Michael was unapologetic. "My attack was absolutely justified," retorted Schumi. "I am a full-blooded race driver."

Formula 1 legend Michael Schumacher never lacked for skill, dedication, or in-a-class-by-itself hubris. The seven-time F1 series championship winner broke both existing records—the most Formula 1 Grand Prix race victories (91), poles (68), and laps led (5,111)—and dozens upon dozens of rules. He was accused of using illegal driver aids and dubious parking maneuvers. At the 1997 European Grand Prix, Schumacher infamously tried to run Jacques Villeneuve off the road and was disqualified from the F1 World Championships; a year later, at the Belgian Grand Prix, Schumacher, trying to outmaneuver David Coulthard, crashed into him, damaging both men's cars, then furiously accused Coulthard of trying to kill him. His wheel-to-wheel excesses were so glaring that F1 tried to curb them with new regulations, which Schumi inevitably found a way to skirt.

Schumacher's single-minded competitiveness has brought him fame and fortune—at his peak, he reportedly was earning $100 million a year in salary and endorsements—and helped elevate F1 from a minority racing series to a multibillion dollar cham-

Michael Schumacher, at the Sports Car World Championship, at the Nürburgring motorsport complex in Germany, 1991.

pionship. Along the way, he raised the bar for physical fitness for drivers and fostered team loyalty and friendships. When Schumacher switched from Benetton to Ferrari in 1996, team engineers Ross Brawn and Rory Byrne were so loyal, they went with him.

But Schumi's take-no-prisoners approach alienated even die-hard fans, and while he is considered to be one of best F1 drivers in history, his legacy remains controversial. "Too often—particularly so for one of his talent—Schumacher has relied on the unfair advantage to win, either created by himself with controversial maneuvers on the track or [off it] in various means by his backers," BBC motorsport editor Andrew Benson wrote at the time of Schumi's retirement in 2006. "Sadly, the length of the list of these incidents rivals that of his best drives."

Born in Hurth, Germany in 1969, Schumacher did not have the typical background of the era's F1 drivers, who tended to be rich jet-setters or aristocrats. Schumacher's father, a bricklayer, ran the local kart track, where Michael got the driving bug. He won his first kart championship at age 6, and by 1987 he was the German and European kart champion. Soon, he left school to work as an apprentice car mechanic,

Driving a Benetton Ford, Schumacher won the 44-lap Belgian Grand Prix in 1992.

and then took a full-time job as a race driver.

Schumacher's big break came in 1991, before the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa, when the star of the Jordan Racing team was arrested and jailed in a road rage incident. The 22-year old Schumacher was a junior driver for Mercedes at the time, but his reputation was stellar, and after Schumi's manager promised Jordan that his client knew the notoriously difficult Spa course (he did not), an agreement was struck for Schumacher to join the Jordan team. In the days that remained until the race, Schumacher prepared by riding the circuit on his fold-up bicycle, to get to know the circuit inch by inch. On race day, the rookie surprised everyone by qualifying seventh and landing a contract with Benetton.

It was a time of change for Formula 1, which recently had banned turbocharged engines as too powerful and dangerous and was instead beginning to lean into technology and computers. Car speeds were accelerating, and race strategies growing more complicated. In short, conditions were perfect for Schumacher, a supreme tactician and speed demon whose career continued its controversial, upward trajectory.

During the 1994 Australian Grand Prix, Schumacher was accused of intentionally colliding with rival Damon Hill, a move that eliminated both drivers from the race. (By taking Hill out, Schumacher also guaranteed he would take the championship.) The same year, in Brazil, Schumacher and his team at Benetton were accused of using illegal traction software, a dust-up that ended with new rules being introduced to safeguard drivers and to ensure ethical behavior among the constructors, or car builders.

In 1996, after four seasons with Benetton, Schumacher moved to Ferrari, which was in disarray at the time, and helped revitalize the team. His 2000 Japanese Grand Prix victory secured his first drivers' title for Ferrari, while his incredible performance in the rain-soaked 2001 Malaysian Grand Prix and his 2004 French Grand Prix win solidified his status as one of the sport's all-time greats.

Schumacher retired in 2006, then returned to the sport in 2010, joining Mercedes, a new team at the time. But he struggled to adapt to new cars and regulations, as well as competing against a younger generation of drivers. His final season was 2012, when he retired for a second time. Not long after, he suffered a horrific skiing accident and suffered brain trauma. Since then, little has been made public about his health condition. □

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For 2026, F1 cars will be about 8 inches shorter and about 66 pounds lighter than the 2025 models. As part of F1's commitment to sustainable fuels, the cars also will have a battery that is about three times more powerful.

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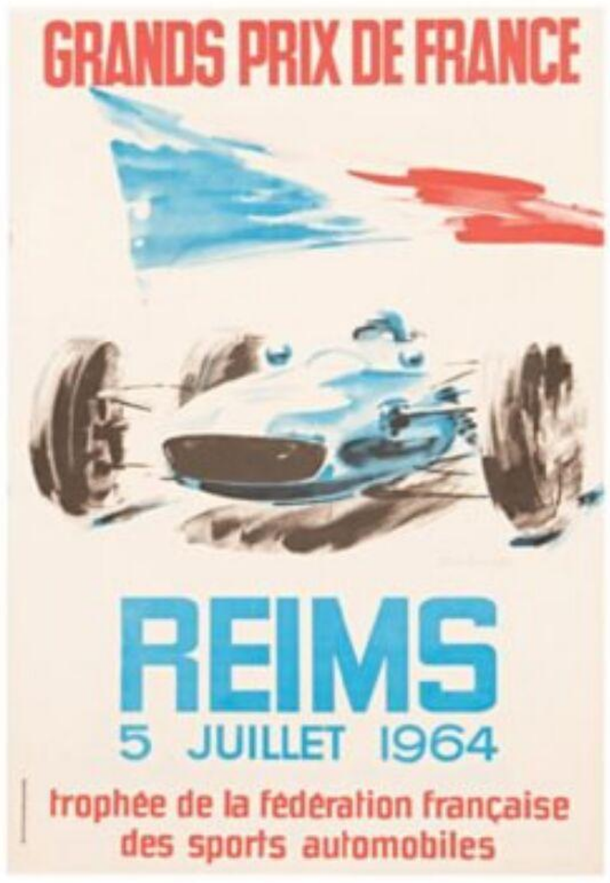
Grand Prix Posters Through the Years

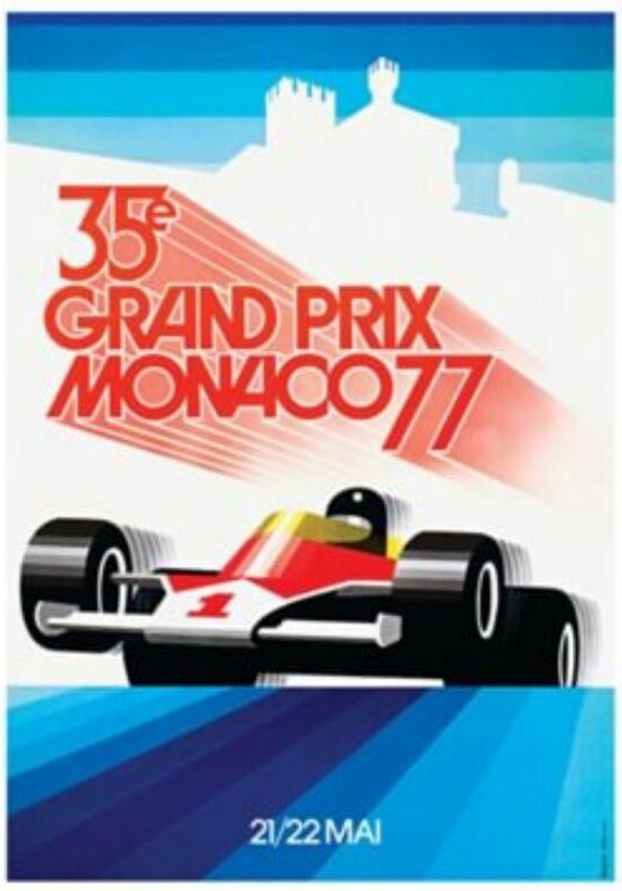
Fans collect Formula 1 posters as memorabilia and investments. On resale sites, the asking price for a vintage edition can be as little as $100 or more than $4,000.

1934

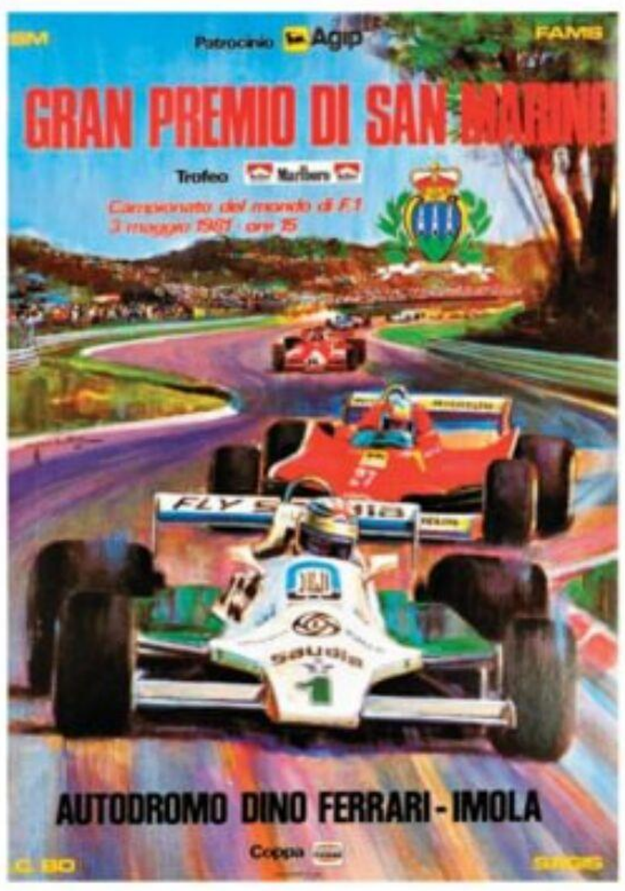
1958



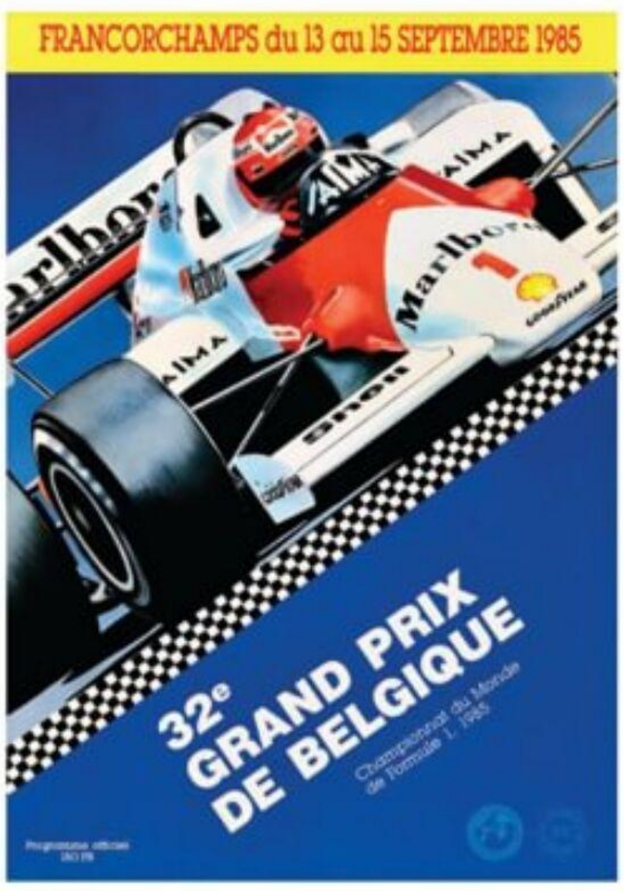
1964



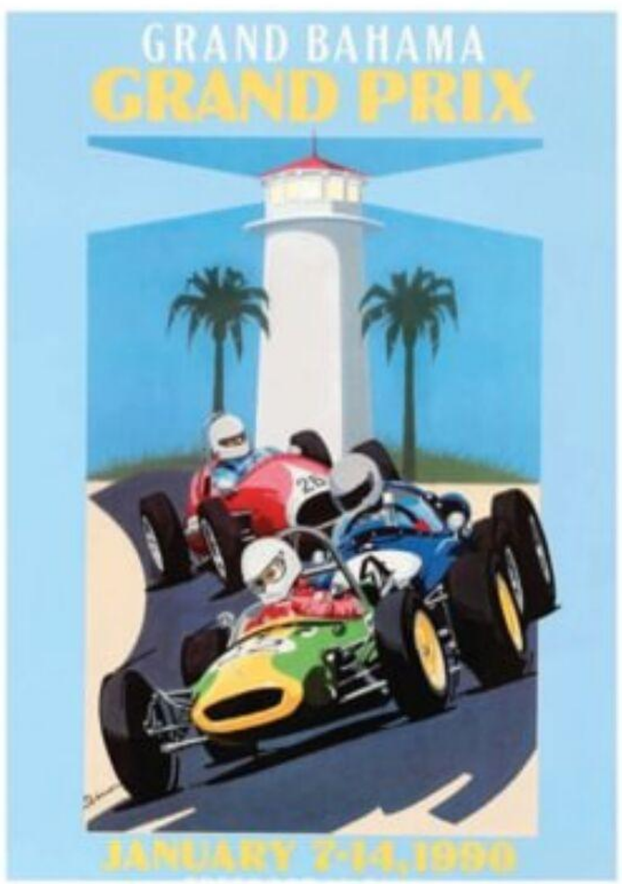
1977



1981

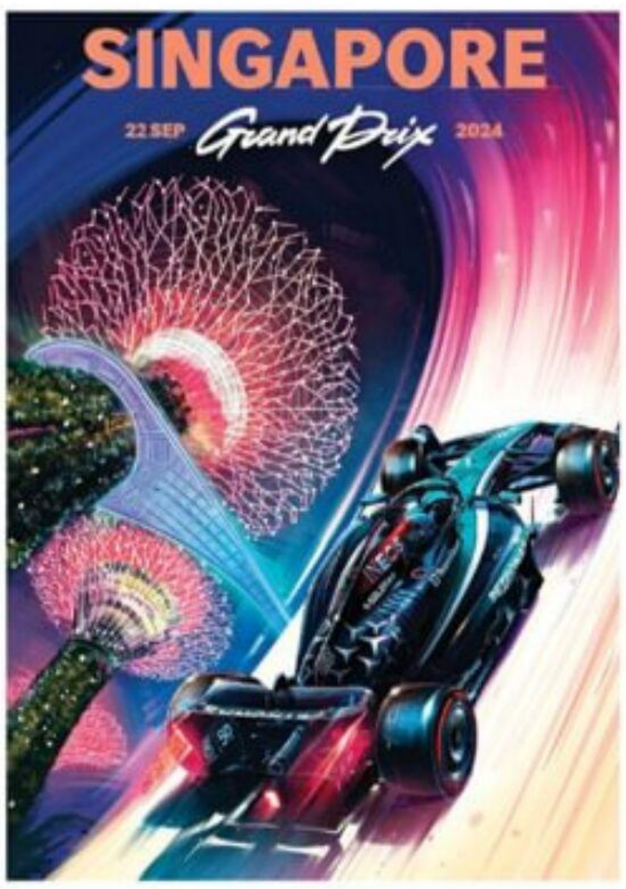


1985

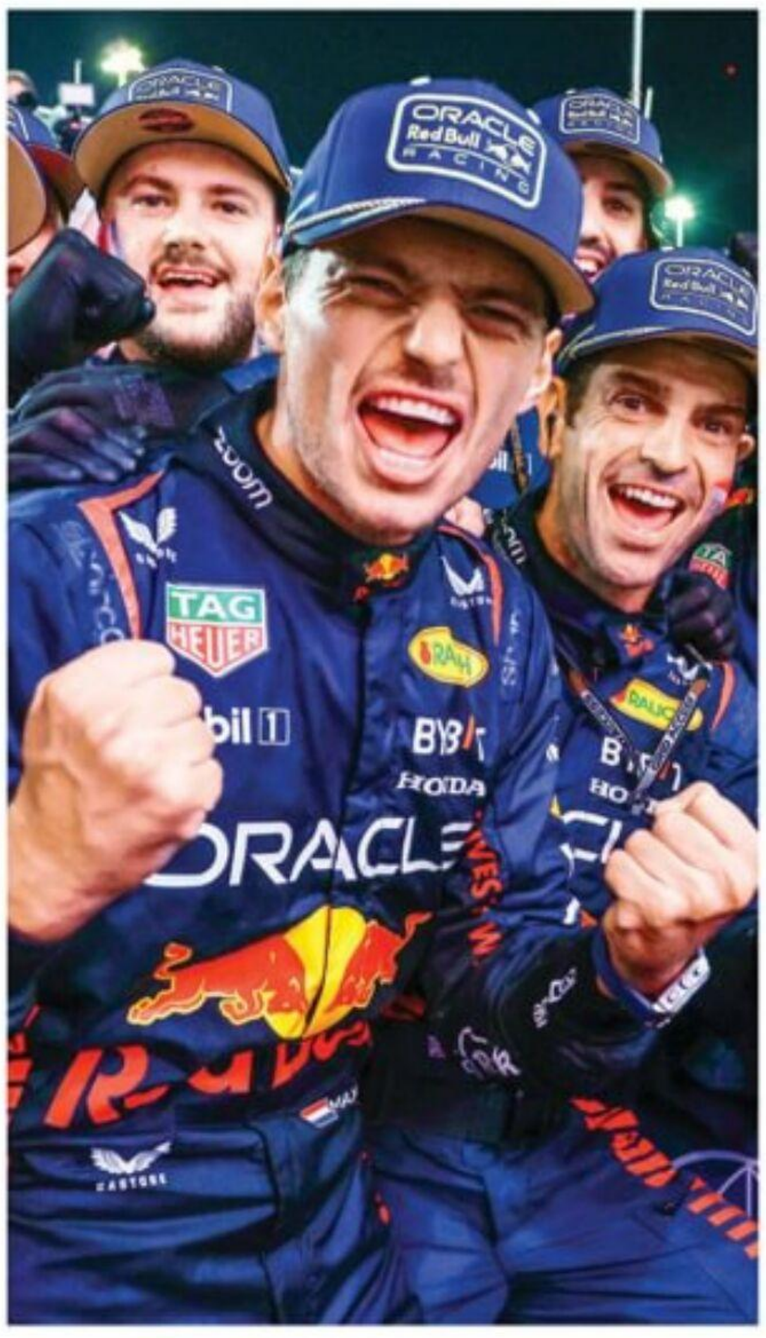


1990

2012



2024

GLAMOUR, GUTS, AND GLORY

Everything about Formula 1 is next level: Speeds that hit 230 mph. Driver talents including Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen. And the gorgeous spectacle of race day. Now, with three Grands Prix on U.S. soil, F1 has gone one step further, bringing its heart-stopping action to a new generation of Americans.